

# How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?

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All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.



### The Paradox of Human Governments

The Eternal (God) created men and women. He gave instructions on how we should live. They are in the Bible! So why are there so many hostilities, even wars, between “Christian” nations and between “Christian” churches?

Why is human history essentially the story of men fighting over questions such as “What is the right form of civil government?” “What is the right form of church government?” “Who should be in charge of such governments?”

We have had theocracies, where the church government *is* the state government; communism, where the state eliminated or controlled church governments and secular states with separation of “church and state” governments. Both civil and church governments have tried one-person rule, everyone rules (democracy), and every combination in between.

We can find historical examples where each kind of government was good for those governed; we can find more examples where each kind of government was bad. Each type of government has certain tendencies, but there are always exceptions (see the chart, below).

All types of governments are susceptible to evil influence and corruption. State or church governments may “officially” be run by monarchs or dictators, but in reality controlled by other, little-known individuals. There are also examples of democracies where individuals paid so little attention to their own government that they either voted away their own proper role or passively allowed their rightful control to be taken away.

There is no single form of human government described in the Bible. Rather, there are many government principles and specific commands for certain aspects of government to be

accomplished in a certain manner. This writer believes that the single most important principle of government is this:

**When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan** (Prv 29:2).

This principle is amplified in the basic instructions for all human governments:

You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you (Deut 16:18-20)

Judges and officers are chosen by “you”—all the people who give offerings (see verse 17). They are appointed both locally (“your gates” refers to cities) and then at the national or state level (“according to your tribes”). There is no importance placed on any specific form, but rather on being just, not accepting bribes, being impartial, etc. The table at the bottom of this page shows that it is **usually not the form** of a government that determines whether it is good or bad, it is **the righteousness or lack of righteousness** of those in control that makes the difference. “Those in control” may be one man, a council, or an entire group of people.

Throughout history, people have placed far too much emphasis on being a **citizen of the right nation** or a **member of the right church**, rather than being concerned with whether or not they are acting righteously as individuals. Unfortunately, **both leaders and followers often encourage this thinking**. The leaders want their

In regard to the issue of:	One-man rule governments		Democracies or republics	
	tend to be:	but sometimes are:	tend to be:	but sometimes are:
Internal efficiency—doing necessary work with the available resources	wasteful as the ruler sees he has no accountability to the people and pursues his own goals rather than the good of the country.	efficient as there is usually only one (the ruler's) idea of how things should be done, and it is carried out.	inefficient as many people have different ideas of how to do things and agreement on any one method is often difficult.	better than most other governments if most people have the good of the whole at heart and individual innovation produces better ways to do things.
Individual rights and liberties	repressive as the ruler maintains his power by squelching all opposition.	protective of individuals when the ruler is committed to protecting individual liberty and thought.	founded on the concept of individual rights and liberties.	repressive toward minority groups as the majority may support measures that persecute a minority group.

followers to think they have “the correct biblical form” of national or church government and that “God is on their side”. If followers believe that opposing their leaders is the same as “opposing God”, then they will not question them and the leaders are much freer to do what they want. Also, it is much easier for a follower to believe that he is “right with the Eternal” simply by being a member of the right nation or church, rather than actually having to live according to the righteousness described in the Bible. The process of yielding oneself to the Eternal on a day-by-day basis can be physically much more difficult than putting up with the requirements of being a member of a nation or church organization.

Because of this innate desire of both leaders and followers to build nations and church organizations, **the Bible teaching about how the Eternal governs through humans has been greatly obscured.**

**If you have not yet studied this subject in the Bible, you will probably be amazed to see what it says—and what it does not say!** There are so many commonly held concepts that people believe are in the Bible which actually are not. There are other plain statements in the Bible that almost no one seems to practice.

### **The Eternal Has Worked In Different Ways Throughout History**

Before studying the Scriptures on how the Eternal governs, it is essential to realize the diversity of ways that the Eternal worked with people throughout the Bible. While the Eternal does not change (Mal 3:6), **the way He works with His people does change.** In 2 Corinthians 3:6-8 we see a “ministry of death” and a “ministry of the spirit.” In 1 Corinthians 12:5 “There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.” Hebrews 1:1-2 summarizes the issue: “**God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past** to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son....”

**There is no single “divine government” or “government of God” described in the Bible.** It is an over-simplification to say that the Bible describes two governments, an Old Testament “Jewish” national government and a New Testament “Church” government. There are at least 10 kinds of governments described. While principles used in one government may apply to those used in other governments, we must be careful not to apply specific commands given to certain people in one situation to our situation today—especially when the Eternal has given us

a different command.

**1. Government in Heaven.** The Eternal governs a large “host in heaven”: angels, arch-angels, cherubim, seraphim, the 24 elders, etc. The first three chapters of Genesis, Job 1:6-12, 1 Kings 22:19-22, Ezekiel 10, Isaiah 6 and many chapters of the book of Revelation give us some understanding of how it works. The different beings appear to have different functions and probably different ranks and authority. However, we find no command for humans to imitate the Eternal’s heavenly government—it is for perfect spirit beings, not humans.

**2. Pre-flood Government.** The first six chapters of Genesis give a very brief account of the world before Noah’s flood. A few other Scriptures refer to this time, such as: “Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him’” (Jude 14-15). There is little said about government or laws at this time, but a clear statement that most people did evil rather than good. We can be sure that **they were not using the exact same laws given to Moses** because Cain and Lamech were not put to death for murdering (Gen 4:11-12,23-24), as was later commanded to Israel (Gen 9:5-6; Ex 21:12-14).

Genesis 1:26 does show that man was given dominion over the entire earth, but does not show that he was given dominion over his fellow man. Another very important concept about all biblical government is found in this chapter. “Then God made two great lights; the greater light to **rule** the day, and the lesser light to **rule** the night” (Gen 1:16). The original language Hebrew here really means “rule”. The Eternal could have chosen a Hebrew word that means “shine” or “light up”, but instead this is the first time we find a word for “rule” in the Bible. This is a good lesson for any rulers: The Sun and Moon provide a service to man; they are powerful; they let no man take away their position. Yet, they do not interfere in matters not part of their job.

**3. Government of the Patriarchs.** We find Abraham being commended for keeping the Eternal’s Laws (Gen 26:5), and some of the Israelites being condemned for not keeping them **before** the Eternal spoke from Mount Sinai (Ex 16:28). Exactly which laws they understood and kept is not certain. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

could not possibly have kept the many laws given to Moses regarding the Levitical priesthood—no such priests had been born yet! Instead, they offered animal sacrifices directly to the Eternal. Abraham did not receive land from the Eternal, nor did he divide what he had fairly among all his sons (Acts 7:2,5; Gen 21:14; 25:6; Deut 21:15-17). When Abraham and Lot had their dispute over grazing land (Gen 13), they settled the problem themselves. There was no mention of judges or officials of any kind.

**4. The Government Given to Ancient Israel.** We have much information on this government in the books of Exodus through 1 Samuel. It was designed to be as fair as possible, with checks and balances included, realizing that humans would be running the government. For example, the priests and Levites were not given a land inheritance and were forbidden to acquire one—the Eternal knew there would be too much temptation for these leaders to use their power to amass empires for themselves. The Israelites were given a system of judges who only had authority when people went to them (Ex 18:16; Deut 17:8-9; 25:1). There was no ruler with power to tax people, to draft them into the military, or to tell them how to run their farm or business. The tithe given to the Levites for their services was a fixed amount that they could not try to increase. The Eternal was their King, not a man (Isa 43:15). If they were obeying the Eternal, no standing army was necessary for “five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you” (Lev 26:8). Unfortunately, the people largely abused this freedom. The concluding verse of the book of Judges states: “In those days *there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*” (Jdgs 21:25).

**5. The Government of the Kings of Israel.** This was the government that the Eternal allowed men to have because they wanted it; He said it would be oppressive (1Sam 8), but that it would still work if they obeyed the Eternal (1Sam 12). The few times when there were good kings, it went well for the people. But most of the time the government was bad for its citizens, leaders and neighbors. After King Solomon died, the people split into two nations, Judah in the south and Israel in the North. They fought each other for many years. Eventually, Israel was taken captive by Assyria and Judah was taken captive by Babylon.

**6. Other Human Civil governments used**

**by the Eternal.** Daniel 4 demonstrates that the Eternal controls this world’s governments, even though He does not condone many of their actions (note especially verse 17). Jesus echoed the same principles to Pilate: “Jesus answered, ‘You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above’” (John 19:11). There are times when the Eternal uses one nation to punish another nation (Isa 10:5-7). The land of Israel was under the control of the Roman government when Christ came. Just because the Eternal uses these governments to accomplish His will, does not mean He agrees with all or even most of their actions. Human civil governments are often described as “beasts” in prophecy.

**7. The Future “Kingdom of God”.** Many passages from the prophets, and many parables of our Savior, describe a coming “Kingdom of God” or Millennium (Rev 20:4). David (Ezk 27:34), the Apostles (Matt 19:29), and others will be kings on thrones on earth. This government seems to be both civil and spiritual, combining some aspects of nearly all the above governments. The main difference is that this government is not staffed by fallible humans, but by Spirit-born children of the Eternal. Today, the Eternal has no throne on the earth, his throne is in Heaven (1Pet 3:22; Rev 3:21). We should not apply scriptures written about these perfect rulers to imperfect human leaders today.

**8. Human Family Government.** This government is limited in scope, but has more “authority” than any other human government. The death penalty was prescribed for those who cursed the Eternal or cursed their parents (Lev 24:16; Ex 21:17), but not for cursing their rulers (Ex 22:28). Parents are given nearly complete authority over their children. (In ancient Israel, an incorrigibly rebellious son could be put to death upon the testimony of his parents—Deut 21:18-21. Also, a man was allowed to nullify a solemn promise that his wife or unmarried daughter made to the Eternal—Num 30:5,12). Nevertheless, wives and children cannot use “Dad said to do it” as an excuse to disobey the Eternal. Abigail was rewarded for following the Eternal, but disobeying her husband (1Sam 25) when he refused to feed those in genuine need (Deut 15:7-8). Furthermore, Paul taught: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph 6:1). Some church groups have claimed that they have a “family government”, and want to give their church leader all of the authority that a husband has in the family. This is a mistake, as the Bible

teaches that Christ is the husband and head of the Church (Eph 5:23), not a human leader.

**9. Government of Satan.** Satan clearly has a kingdom on earth (Job 1:7; Matt 12:26; John 12:31; 2Cor 4:4). His followers are demons—angels that sinned (Luke 11:18, 2Pet 2:4). These demons vary in power (Mark 9:17-29). Satan’s demons sometimes act as “princes” over various countries of this world, and sometimes oppose angelic messengers (Dan 10:12-13). Satan has often tried to make his government look like the true Church (2Cor 11:13). This began very early with Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), and will culminate in a great false church and state system symbolized by the “beast” and “false prophet” (Rev 13-20). This makes it necessary for brethren to weigh the fruits of those who claim to be leaders. “And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars” (Rev 2:2). Two characteristics of these false governments are leaders who like to be “preeminent” over other men, and who “put people out of a church” simply for associating with certain other brethren (3Jn 9-10). These verses in 3 John, as well as the letters to churches in Revelation 2 and 3, show

the Church frequently has false teachers and doctrines mixed in it. We should not point to the many church organizations and call some of them “God’s churches” and the rest “Satan’s churches”. Rather, we should realize that Satan will try to corrupt all of them to whatever degree he can—even our own group!

**10. Government of the Church (the Assembly of Believers).** This government is the main subject of the rest of this paper. We will cover it in great detail. **It is the one government where our readers have the most personal choice:** you can probably choose which religious government you will follow, but it may be difficult or impossible to choose a different national government. Since the Holy Spirit is available to the people in this government, it could be capable of reflecting the very love of the Eternal in its dealings. Unfortunately, even sincere believers are not yet perfect, and there are “tares among the wheat” (Matt 13:24-30)—false brethren and false teachers. The purpose of this government is not to replace national governments, but to promote peace and growth among the brethren and to train them to be kings and priests (Rev 1:6; 1Pet 2:9).

### What Many People Believe vs. What the Bible Actually Says

The following table shows the many differences between what people commonly believe and what the Bible actually states. Some of these things may surprise you, but we doubt very much that you can find any scripture to support any of the statements made in the left-hand column. We doubt that any leader in a church organization can do it either. But if you honestly finish reading this paper, you will see scriptures that prove the statements made in the right-hand column.

It is hard to overcome mistakes that have been with us for hundreds of years. This paper will also show you how even Bible translators were misled by “traditional Christian doctrine”, and sometimes put words into our English Bibles to support common church teaching, even though they realized that they were changing the message of the original languages. (You do not need to be a Greek or Hebrew scholar to understand these problems, you can see them yourself with English-language Bible helps.)

What Many People Believe:	What the Bible Actually Says:
“The Church” consists of one or more church organizations, and the members who belong to them.	The Church consists of people who are led by Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit, no matter where they worship. The Bible nowhere encourages the formation of church organizations.
Christ is the head of the Church and He set up a human government in the Church so that all doctrinal questions and conflicts can be resolved and unity can be achieved.	Christ is the Head of the Church, but he taught that unity will be achieved by brethren who love and respect each other in spite of differences. There are examples of church leaders and brethren disagreeing without separating or declaring each other to be “unbelievers”.
Deacons take care of the physical aspects of a congregation and ministers take care of the spiritual.	The New Testament Greek uses the identical word for “minister” and “deacon”. The two different words were added in English translations. The Greek word simply means “servant”. The people who read Paul’s original writing could not possibly have understood separate “physical servants” and “spiritual servants”.

What Many People Believe:	What the Bible Actually Says:
The New Testament ministers are a kind of replacement for the Levitical (Old Testament) priests.	The New Testament ministry and Levitical priests existed together for about 40 years. Some Levitical priests became believers. <b>All</b> believers are part of the New Testament priesthood.
Ordained ministers are needed to baptize people into the Church (often as infants).	It matters little who baptizes a person—the Scripture does not specifically say who must do it. A person becomes part of the Church only if he truly repents (infants are too young to baptize).
Ordained ministers are needed to marry people.	Wedding celebrations are mentioned, but there is no example of a priest or minister “marrying” anyone. Marriages were made by agreements between the families involved. (Secular history teaches us that the practice of minister-performed marriages did not begin until about 1400 years after Christ.)
Ordained ministers are needed to preach funerals.	When people die, the living mourn, but there is never a mention of anyone preaching a funeral message.
Ordained ministers are needed to anoint the sick.	Believers can be anointed by elders—which are not necessarily “ordained ministers.” Healing also occurs via prayers of other believers—even if they are not elders.
Ordained ministers are needed to preach sermons in services.	The word “sermon” never appears in the Bible. A variety of brethren prayed, sang, taught, exhorted, and preached and used other spiritual gifts in each service.
Each Church should have a Pastor to preach, teach, counsel, visit the sick, warn those who are sinning, organize activities, and perform the other “ministerial” functions listed above.	Spiritual gifts are distributed directly by Christ among all believers. Believers are responsible for recognizing and using their gifts, rather than simply paying a “church pastor” to act as if he had all of the gifts. There is a gift of being a “pastor”, but it involves overall guidance of a congregation, not doing all of the items mentioned at left. Everyone is given one or more gifts!
Disobeying your church group’s leaders is like disobeying the Eternal. If a leader seems to depart from truth, members should wait for the Eternal’s correction.	Members should obey and cooperate with recognized leaders in the Church. However, they are also responsible to judge them by their fruits and by their teaching, and leave them if they depart from biblical standards. Each person is ultimately responsible for obeying the Eternal—even if leaders “go bad”.
A person becomes a minister when he is ordained by a previously ordained minister. Some believe there is an unbroken chain of ordinations all the way back to the apostles. Ordination comes about by a ceremony usually involving the laying on of hands, and is for life unless revoked by the group that ordained the minister.	There is no Greek New Testament word that means “ordain” as defined at left. Major English translations vary wildly as to where they include the word “ordain” in the New Testament— <b>the New English Bible does not use it at all</b> . The New Testament emphasizes divine spiritual gifts to perform certain services. Brethren accepted into leadership positions are expected to meet higher standards of personal behavior. Some men are given the gift of leadership. Some church leaders are appointed by other recognized church leaders, others are chosen by the brethren. The act of laying-on-of-hands is sometimes involved in this process, but laying on of hands is used more often for other things (healing, filling with the Holy Spirit, blessing of children, etc).
Church organizations and congregations have “church offices” that must be filled (pastor, minister, evangelist, bishop, apostle, missionary, treasurer, youth director, etc.). When offices become vacant due to death or departure, a new person must be selected to fill the office.	Apostleship might be considered a New Testament “church office”, but after Matthias replaced Judas, there is no record of “apostolic succession.” The New Testament records several leaders dying or preparing for their death, but none of them ever spoke about a successor. Rather, the entire focus of New Testament leaders is on those whom the Eternal chose to lead—usually confirmed by miracles or by appointment from the apostles (who did miracles). Today, we do not have recognized apostles like Peter and Paul to appoint local leaders, so we should look to those who have some fruit in their lives, rather than look to those who are “filling an office”.

What Many People Believe:	What the Bible Actually Says:
Church organizations are necessary to produce a <b>statement of beliefs</b> so that everyone in the group can know what is necessary to believe for salvation.	The Bible contains no list of exactly what a person must believe or do to be saved. Each person must give their entire life to Christ. This may involve different things for different people. (In practice, doctrinal statements often discourage Bible study. Lazy people see little reason to learn things outside of the “required beliefs”, and studious people may fear being “kicked out” of their church organization if their Bible study reveals an error in their organization’s statement of beliefs.)
Church organizations are necessary to build church buildings, hold services, take care of the poor, spread the Gospel etc.	The New Testament Church met in houses, synagogues, or in one case, a school. There is no mention of a “church building”. Believers were taught to individually take care of the poor. Collections were sometimes taken for poor people in specific other areas, but there is no example of an organization that collected money in a “poor fund”.

If the above statements appear unreasonable or impossible, please keep reading this paper! We readily admit that many **good works** have been done by people who were operating under the false assumptions of some of the doctrines mentioned in the left-hand column. This writer and nearly every believer he knows learned much Bible Truth from Bible teachers who had made some of these mistakes. But if we really want to obey and understand the close relationship that Christ promises to have with every member of His Church, then we need to read and learn what the Bible actually says.

### The Foundation of Church Government from the Bible

We begin our study of church government by quoting Scriptures that are clearly about government. This makes much more sense than assuming our own ideas of government and then trying to justify them in Scripture. This writer encourages you to read every one of these verses even if you are already familiar with them. There are many good points here that most people have overlooked.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan (Prv 29:2).

But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (1Cor 11:3)

...Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also **Christ is head of the church**; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore,

just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church (Eph 5:21-29).

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Eph 6:1).

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, **all of you be submissive to one another**, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble” (1Pet 5:5).

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me,



but **I chose you and appointed you** that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another (John 15:14-17).

...But there was also rivalry among them [the apostles], as to **which of them should be considered the greatest**. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so *among you*; on the contrary; **he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves**" (Luke 22:23-26).

So the LORD said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. "Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will **take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them**; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone (Num 11:16-17).

Therefore, brethren, **seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom**, whom we may appoint over this business (Acts 6:3).

Then He called His twelve disciples together and **gave them power** and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:1).

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go....**Heal the sick** there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:1,9).

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.... <sup>4</sup>There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup>There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. <sup>7</sup>But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to

each one for the profit of *all*.... <sup>12</sup>For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. <sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>18</sup>But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.... <sup>21</sup>And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." <sup>22</sup>No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.... <sup>25</sup>that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another (1Cor 12:1,4-7,12-13,18,21-22,25).

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us [everyone with the Holy Spirit, not just the "leaders"] **kings and priests** to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev 1:6).

Not that we [church leaders] have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand (2Cor 1:24).

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His (Rom 8:9).

By this all will **know that you are My disciples**, if **you** have love for one another (John 13:35).

## Principles From the Above Scriptures

1. It is good to have the righteous in authority, whether they are spirit beings, fathers, dictators, elected officials, congregational leaders, employers, military generals or any other position. The form of government matters far less than the righteousness of those who govern.

2. The strongest biblical line of authority is from the Father, to the Son, to a man, to his wife, to his children. Other governments are given almost no rights to interfere here.

3. Husbands and wives have much stronger authority over their families than the religious leaders have over the brethren. Just as our Savior only directs His People to do that which is good for His Church, a husband is responsible to direct

his wife and family **only** in ways that benefit his wife and family.

4. **All authority** is to be used **to serve others**, not to elevate oneself. **All the saints** are to submit to each other as the need arises. Christ, who was far superior to His apostles, treated them as friends, telling them everything. How much more should righteous human leaders treat members as friends? All must be done in love.

5. We are all in training to exercise authority over others **so we can help people** who need it. All those who “endure until the end” will become kings and priests. The Eternal is not training one group (“ministers”) to exercise authority, and another group (“laymen”) to be only obedient followers.

6. The Eternal sometime chooses people directly, sometimes has men appoint people, and sometimes asks the group to pick people who are already exhibiting the fruit.

7. The Eternal gives spiritual gifts and power to people to do what needs to be done.

8. People are not considered members of the Church based on recognition by a church leader, but based on the Holy Spirit in them and the outward manifestation of love shown.

There are other scriptures and principles that could be mentioned. But the above points seem to be the foundation—repeated many times, and shown by many other examples in Scripture.

### How Did it All Go Wrong?

Satan has deceived the whole world, including, to the extent possible, “even the elect”—those with whom the Eternal is working (Rev 12:9; Matt 24:24). Many of the epistles written late in the New Testament period show that many false teachers had already entered the various church congregations:

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work... (2Thes 2:7).

...even now many antichrists have come... (1Jn 2:18).

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars (Rev 2:2).

Even secular church history records that as the first and second centuries passed, more and more church leaders claimed authority through

### How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?

their position and who “ordained” them, less and less claimed authority because of miracles or prophetic utterances directly from the Eternal (see Encyclopedia Britannica, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., article *Prophet*: [91.1911encyclopedia.org/P/PR/PROPHET.htm](http://91.1911encyclopedia.org/P/PR/PROPHET.htm)).

Finding the truth of church history during the first few centuries after Christ’s death is often difficult. The last letter of John shows us that false leaders were often casting the true brethren out of the church (3Jn 9-10). Persecutions caused many of the early groups and their writings to be destroyed. Gradually, many church members began to look more and more to the “bishops” in various cities for leadership, and eventually the “bishops” began to look to the bishop in Rome and/or Constantinople for leadership. When the Roman emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion (313 A.D.), persecution of Christians was greatly reduced, but all hope was lost for the “organized church” to get back to a Christ-governed group of spirit-filled people. This officially recognized church maintained its outward form of religious services and preaching of righteousness, but internally operated like another political institution. The New Testament canon was finalized about this time. There certainly still were some brethren who were trying to live by its words and some who had verbally maintained the traditions of the first century church. But as time went on, these “Bible believers” began to be persecuted, both by governments and by the big organized churches.

Many more pages would be required to even begin to cover the doctrinal changes and other unbiblical practices that became incorporated into mainstream Christianity from this time onward. Since this is a paper on government, we will summarize what happened to the government.

Since New Testament teaching is based on the Old Testament, let us consider a few broad principles there. The government given to the Israelites through Moses was primarily a “rule of law”. The laws were written for everyone to see (Deut 27:6-8), and **everyone, including the top leaders, were expected to follow them**. When situations arose which the laws did not cover, or when there was a question of how the law was to be applied, then judges would render a decision. These decisions were either remembered or written down, and used again when similar situations occurred. As long as just judgments were made, this built up a very useful body of “case law” upholding the laws that the Eternal gave. Unfortunately, when unjust judgments are mixed into the system, the result is a

complex mess of laws, which lawyers and their clients could cunningly use to “get around” the intent of the original law. This is the problem for which Christ chastised the leaders of his day (Matt 15:6)—a problem that plagues most Western democracies of our day.

Christ made it clear that He did not come to do away with the righteous law given by the Father (“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets”—Matt 5:17). He came to die for our sins and to give us the power to live a way of righteousness that exceeds the commandments written in stone. “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2Cor 3:6). Christ showed that a person attempting to obey the law on his own could not save himself (Rom 3:20). It was not because the law was bad, but because sinful human beings simply cannot obey it under their own strength (Heb 8:7-8; Matt 11:27-30). Christ went on to give new spiritual principles for governing in His Church (Matt 18:15-20). He allowed his followers to make judgments apart from the existing Jewish legal system of the day. Christ offered a “new covenant”—a chance to start anew!

But as the Old Testament teaching **was perverted** by those who taught it, so was the New Testament teaching. The New Testament emphasis on leaders with spiritual gifts was replaced by ordination—appointment by some other human church leader. The New Testament emphasis on following the spirit, rather than the letter of the law, **was perverted** to do away with the law. This perverted teaching required members to obey the commands of church leaders (supposedly church leaders were more spiritual than anyone else), rather than Scripture. Even though the Scriptures forbid it, church leaders began to take on lofty titles, such as “father”, “teacher”, “master”, even “vicar of Christ”—which means “in place of Christ” (Matt 23:8-10).

After the fourth century A.D., most people who called themselves Christian were governed by a *hierarchy* or a *hierarchical government*. A hierarchy is a multi-layer government where the lowest level people are responsible to the first level of leadership, who are then responsible to the next level of leadership, who are then responsible to the top leader. The above describes a 4-level hierarchy, but hierarchies can have as few as three levels, or as many levels as one cares to imagine. Military governments typically have

numerous levels. Hierarchies are the best form of government to make people do things that they do not want to do. People in hierarchies are usually commanded to exclusively follow the leader immediately over them, and not to obey or even talk to others in other parts of the hierarchy. Each leader has absolute authority over those underneath him: if they do not follow him, he can punish and get rid of them (in the military, execute them; in the church, cast them out). People are taught to follow without questioning or even knowing why they are carrying out their particular assignment. While it is the job of higher level leaders to make sure that lower level leaders are not misusing their authority, they are often unconcerned as long as the lower-level leaders are getting their job done. Before modern transportation and communication, it could take months to appeal from one level of government to the next higher level; the potential for abuse was high! When the top leader of a hierarchical government is both evil and clever, it is very difficult for anyone to change the situation: he often continues in his evil until he dies.

The mainstream Christian church hierarchy essentially consisted of members, who were sometimes governed by “deacons”. These deacons reported to a congregation pastor, who usually reported to a bishop (local overseer). The bishop may have reported to an arch-bishop (regional overseer), who reported to the head bishop (usually the Bishop of Rome). There were other bishops who fought for and sometimes achieved dominance over certain parts of the Christian world. As the years went by the “bottom line” for nearly all congregations was to “obey the dictates of Rome” or risk excommunication. For about twelve hundred years (c 300-1500) A.D., the strength of this central “Roman Catholic Church” continued, and most members became further and further removed from the Bible. Worship services consisted of man-made liturgy. Messages often consisted mostly of “be good, work hard, and support your church and king”. What little Scripture that was read in the common service was usually in Latin—a language not understood by most people. Massive church buildings were built—often by forced or coerced labor (“you will go to heaven sooner if you work on this building for 20 years”). In the minds of the people, “the church” often **was** the building, and secondarily, the people who were in charge of it.

Once people are **deceived** into thinking that the Eternal requires them to follow certain leaders or a church organization, they become en-

trapped. The leaders demand obedience to themselves, and members feel like they are being righteous and pleasing the Eternal when they please their human leaders. (If you are the politically-cooperative type, it is often much easier to please a human leader, than it is to please the Eternal.) These people rely on their organization to learn “new truth,” so it becomes very difficult for them to learn anything outside of their organization’s teachings.

During the 1400s the Roman Catholic Church was the supreme religious hierarchy in Europe. They began asserting more and more control over individual’s lives. Up to this time in history, most marriages were handled as a contract between the people marrying—or a contract between their parents. You can find marriage celebrations in the Bible—even a “master of the feast”—the person in charge of giving it (John 2:8-9). But you will look in vain to find a priest or minister officiating at any wedding. As might be expected of human nature, many people failed to live up to their marriage contracts. So “the church” offered their services and began to serve as a witness of the marriage contract, and to “give their blessing”. Not much later, they began to “perform” the ceremony. These practices continued through the Protestant reformation, and were assimilated by the Jews. Today, Rabbis officiate at weddings in a way that they would not have five hundred years ago. Similarly, the Catholic custom of administering “last rites” to the dead evolved into the modern custom of preaching a funeral service.

As Catholic control of members increased, so did corruption within the church. Anyone who disagreed with the leaders in even small points was branded a heretic. Heretics were hunted down by well-financed armies and sometimes given a chance to recant, but more often tortured or eliminated. Much money was extracted from the populace by a variety of unbiblical means. “Forgiveness from sins” was for sale in the form of written documents (“indulgences”) produced by local church officials. “Forgiveness” for very big sins was available from the Pope—for a higher fee. The people were often poor while the church was wealthy. In many areas the Catholic Church owned one fourth of all available land. Church offices were bought and sold. “Celibate” priests and monks had a steady stream of concubines or affairs with parishioners. The people doubted that this life-style was supported by the Scriptures, but Scriptures were read only in Latin, a language not understood by most people.

Priests often interpreted Scripture to suit the needs of the moment.

The 1500’s was the century of the Protestant Reformation. Leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and Jacques Lefevre originally sought reforms for these many abuses, but they found a Catholic Church that was in the habit of excommunicating anyone who challenged its authority. Advances in printing technology allowed the reformers to reach enough people tired of the church abuse. Many new independent denominations formed. Although many died for their beliefs, reform ideas found support even among a significant number of the nobility, providing havens for those persecuted in other districts.

During these times, over a dozen translations of the Bible were produced in European languages. Most were set in type and printed on the presses of the day. Most were banned; copies were burned; and over half of the translators involved were executed for their “crimes”. (Today, we would not view the job of “Bible translator” as a high-risk profession.) Some were killed by old church rulers. Some were killed by “Reformists” who wanted only “a little bit” of reform.

The following few pages of this article are slightly technical, but the information is essential to understand what has happened to the Bible, and the Bible-believing churches of our day. This writer is convinced that the time you spend with this will be well worth it.

### **Translation in Troubled Times**

In general, the King James Version (KJV) is a very good translation. As much as practical, it tries to maintain a word for word correspondence between the English text and the original language manuscripts. Yet in verses about government, the New Testament KJV contains many mistranslated words. These KJV errors became further entrenched as other translators copied them and as church administrators and other theologians wrote their doctrinal statements based on them. We are not talking about errors that only a Greek expert can detect, but many that you can easily verify from a concordance or Greek-English dictionary.

In England, Henry VIII was king from 1509 to 1547. He began as a staunch defender of Catholicism, but backed away as the Pope refused to grant him a divorce from his wife, Catherine, aunt of the powerful emperor Charles the Fifth. Henry felt he must have a male heir, which Catherine did not seem able to provide. In 1532 he

declared himself head of the Church of England and outlawed any payments to the Pope in Rome. He continued to plunder the wealth of the monasteries, while at the same time executing heretics who denied the doctrines of his church. These doctrines were essentially the same as the Catholic Church—only the leader was different. Henry was not a theological reformer, but an astute politician who used the popular anti-Catholic ideas of the day to further his political goals. Those Europeans loyal to the Pope were too busy dealing with their own Protestant Reformation problems to mount a crusade to bring Henry VIII back into submission to the Catholic Church.

After Henry's death, a council governed England from 1547 to 1553 while Henry's son, Edward VI, was still too young to rule. Some religious reforms took place during this time, as well as persecution of Catholics. When Edward VI died young, Mary I, Henry's oldest daughter returned to England and became Queen. She was married to the King of Spain, and was a devout Catholic. In a short time, she reestablished ties with Rome and began persecuting Protestants with a vengeance that earned her the title "Bloody Mary". Reformers and English-language Bible translators were some of her chief targets. Mary died after five years, bringing Elizabeth I to power (1558-1603). Elizabeth favored the Church of England but allowed Catholics, as well as those wanting much more religious reform, to peacefully exist with only minor fines and restrictions. Most of this **toleration** continued even after she was "excommunicated" by the Pope. Several new translations of the Bible appeared during her reign. Puritans and other fundamentalist groups fed on their newly found knowledge of the Scriptures. Some of these groups were officially persecuted and the "heretical translations" were blamed.

**With this background, King James came to the throne and the King James Version was produced.** On January 6, 1604, only a few months after he began to reign, King James called a conference at Hampton Court Palace to settle some differences among the clergy. While little else was accomplished at the conference, most agreed that a single Bible translation was needed. Up to this point, nearly all of the historical information presented can be found in any standard encyclopedia under the articles "church", "reformation", and "Bible". To find out exactly what happened at the conference, is a little more difficult. The following information came from the Encyclopedia Britannica, 11<sup>th</sup> edition. (Later edi-

tions covered this information less thoroughly.) Original sources for the information are cited in the encyclopedias. (This history is not an essential part of proving **what happened** to the King James Bible—this is evident from the Hebrew and Greek reference works covered later. This history explains **how and why it happened**).

Dr. John Reynolds, president of Corpus Christi College, actually proposed the new translation. King James agreed and wrote that he "wished... for one uniform translation... and this to be done by the best learned in both universities; after them to be reviewed by the bishops and the chief learned of the Church; from them to be presented to the privy council; **and lastly to be ratified by his royal authority; and so the whole church to be bound unto it and none other**". Forty-six men were assigned to the project, broken down into six groups that worked on sections of the Bible (Gen-2Kngs; 1Chr-Eccl; Isa-Mal; Apocrypha; Matt-Acts, Rev & Rom-Jude). The men were chosen without regard to party—they really were the best men. Fifteen rules were given to the translators, of which we will reprint some:

**1)** The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called "the Bishops' Bible," to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.

**3)** The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz. The word *Church* not to be translated *Congregation*, etc.

**4)** When a word hath divers significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the ancient fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place and the analogy of the faith.

**6)** No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words which cannot, without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.

**8)** Every particular man of each company to take the same chapter or chapters; and having translated or amended them severally by himself where he thinketh good, all to meet together, confer what they have done, and agree for their parts what shall stand.

**9)** As any one company hath dispatched any one book in this manner, they shall send it to the rest to be considered of seriously and judiciously, for his majesty is very careful in this point.

**10)** If any company, upon the review of the book so sent, doubt or differ upon any place,

to send them word thereof, not the place, and withal send the reasons; to which if they consent not, the difference to be compounded at the general meeting, which is to be of the chief persons of each company at the end of the work.

**11)** When any place of special obscurity is doubted of, letters to be directed by authority to send to any learned man in the land for his judgment of such a place.

**12)** Letters to be sent from every bishop to the rest of his clergy, admonishing them to his translation in hand, and to more and charge as many as being skillful in the tongues and having taken pains in that kind, to send his particular observations to the company either at Westminster, Cambridge or Oxford [the three places where the work was being done].

**Rules 8 to 12** show the great effort made to really arrive at a very good translation. Essentially, the project began with seven to nine men translating each verse themselves. This prevented a dominant personality from swaying all of the others. Anyone's good idea would be considered. Differences were then worked out in meetings, first among the group and then among the group leaders. Any knowledgeable person in the country could be consulted for help. As a result, the basic translation was very good. Unfortunately, the church hierarchy and King James still had the ultimate say. Because of **rule 6** (no marginal notes), the KJV Bible reader had little way of knowing which words of the Bible were the best possible translation, and which were the command of the King. **Rule 3** shows that there were places where the King's wishes overrode what would otherwise be linguistically correct. The King ordered that the Greek *ekklesia* be translated "church", to support his religious organization even though "congregation" or "assembly" would be a better translation. We can know that *ekklesia* did not exclusively mean a Christian religious organization or building in first century Greek because the word is used three times to refer to an assembly of unbelievers in Ephesus (Acts 19:32,39,41). **Rule 4** confirms that decisions were made in favor of church tradition ("commonly used by the most of the ancient fathers") and to support church doctrine ("the analogy of the faith").

King James spent much of his time with ecclesiastical matters. He saw himself as head of the Church of England and did not want other sects basing their doctrines on disputed knowledge of the Scriptures. He gave the translators time and provision to complete their task. The

translators gave him what he wanted. They were certainly aware of the past hundred-year history of death-sentences for those who opposed the state-chosen religion (whatever it was). Many of them probably did not feel bad about the King's and clergy's changes of a word or two here and there. To many, the King was the head of "The Eternal's government on earth".

When a generous portion of error is mixed with truth, some of the error obviously sticks out and is quickly noticed. **When a tiny bit of error is mixed with a vast amount of truth, it can go unnoticed for a long time.** Such is the case with the KJV Bible. Only a tiny fraction of the KJV words were deliberately changed by the King and his religious advisers, but those few words had a great effect on church organizations for hundreds of years. To the Bible reader, the King's doctrinal alterations were indistinguishable from the rest of the translation. So King James' understanding of doctrine took on all the force and authority of an otherwise good translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. This paper will show the major errors that relate to church government. Some of these errors have been corrected by later translations, others still influence Bible translation today.

### The Practice of "Ordination"

You have probably never heard a sermon or read an article that explained the doctrine of "ordination" **from the Bible.** (If you have, this writer would very much like a copy of it.) To know what "ordain" or "ordination" means, we must go to a dictionary—or the literature of a church organization. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Tenth Edition) states:

**1:** To invest officially (as by the laying on of hands) with ministerial or priestly authority. **2 a:** to establish or order by appointment, decree, or law, enact. **b:** destine, foreordain: to issue an order.

The second definition is usually used for the Eternal or those in high office. (e.g.: "The Eternal ordained that the Earth should orbit the Sun"; "Ford management ordained new safety regulations to be adopted by all factories.") This second definition does not find too much controversy in day-to-day religious practice. Few people will argue about whether the Eternal "ordained" that the Earth orbit the Sun, decreed that it would, or simply did it. It is only a matter of semantics.

Definition one, however, is often very important to Church government. It is such a vital part of most church organizations, that most people take it for granted and feel no need to try to estab-

lish the doctrine from the Bible. In the minds of many people, “ordination” includes even more than the definition above. Most people believe (and most churches teach) that an ordained person is qualified to do things that an un-ordained person is not—such as perform marriages, baptisms, counseling, and other ordinations. They believe that this ordination is retained for life, unless the same church organization revokes it. Also, many have the idea that there is an unbroken line of ordinations from the apostles to the founder of their church organization to the minister in their local congregation. Many people would say that “ordination” is a spiritual event recognizing those who are chosen in Heaven, and men just carry out the ceremony here on Earth. The combination of the two definitions for ordination make it a very powerful concept: If the Eternal “ordains” the sky to be blue and “ordains” a man to lead your congregation, how can anyone possibly speak against either one?

**But is it really the Eternal who actually performs “ordinations” or is it merely human church organizations?**

We will cover the Scriptures on this in the next few pages, but first, it is important to see the **contradictory manner in which organizations actually treat “ordained people”**. While church organizations “ordain” men as “ministers of Christ”, in reality they are largely ministers in that organization. Why? **The following reasons show why “ordination” is an organizational practice, not a strictly biblical one:**

1) Organizations usually “ordain” men after some training or because of a need for an “ordained” person in a certain position. They rarely ever “ordain” people based on recognition of spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture.

2) Organizations, in general, will not accept a minister from another group to serve in their own organization—even though they believe that members in other organizations are part of the “true Church”. They will accept members from other groups—along with their baptisms and weddings—even though ministers of another group performed them. However, organizations will not accept ministers from other groups without some kind of additional training, approval, or even “re-ordination”.

3) Most organizations have **no official process** for ensuring that the scriptural qualifications for leaders in the congregation are met (1Tim 3; Titus 1). If an organization needs ministers, they will “ordain” young, unmarried men right out of college, or they will ordain long-

time men in the congregation **without asking people who know them** whether they live as described in these chapters.

4) Organizations sometimes **revoke “ordinations”** of ministers who leave a group to start their own congregation. Yet, if people are baptized or married by that “minister who has left”, and then decide to join the original organization—the organization will usually accept that baptism and marriage—even though it was done by someone from whom they “revoked” their ordination. In other words, they still recognize his work in the Church, but they remove his “ordination” because he no longer works for their group.

5) Organizations that do recognize ministers in other groups still often have **internal rules** that allow them to hire only ministers ordained by their own group. Some groups even pay their ministers (or lay them off when necessary) based on how long they have been “ordained”, their type of “ordination” or both. Indeed, some have multiple levels of “ordinations” through which aspiring ministers can hope to advance their career—like positions in the corporate ladder or government civil-service jobs. The bearing of **spiritual fruit or works often has little part in such decisions**. Yes, “ordination” is more often a **job placement** than it is an appointment from the Eternal.

The actual implementation of “ordination” varies among church organizations, but nearly all of them rely upon some form of “ordination” for their organizational structure. If “ordinations” really were from the Eternal, one would think that people would want to know if there were any miracles or signs that accompanied them. If “ordinations” were from the Eternal”, it seems that all organizations would recognize other groups’ “ordinations”, just as they recognize other group’s members—as long as the people were actually bearing spiritual fruit. But this is not the way it is. “Ordinations” are most often a tool of organizations used to control their ministry and membership.

Organizations that claim to be the one and only “true Church” do not have **some** of the above logical inconsistencies because they claim that their “ordained ministers” are the only true ministers in the world, and all other “ordinations” are false. However, they have an even bigger problem with which to deal: If they believe they are the “one Church” because all of their doctrines are correct, ask them to historically document the group that held their same doctrines for the last 1000 years. If they believe

they are the “one Church” because their leader was ordained in a succession of ordinations since the early apostles, ask them if they have a historical list of these hierarchical leaders. This writer has never seen any group (except the Roman Catholic Church) attempt to answer either one of the above questions. They can neither prove that their current leadership nor their list of doctrines are the ones that have been “in Christ’s church” for hundreds of years. In essence, you must simply take the word of the group that they are the “one true church”.

Yes, there *are* leaders in the Bible. There are biblical leaders who appoint other leaders. We can recognize these leaders by their fruits (Matt 7:15-20), not by their ordination certificate. What does the Bible say about ordination? If you have not studied this before, you will probably be surprised!

### “Ordination” Forced Into The King James Version of the Bible

**Is there a word in the original Hebrew and Greek languages that has the modern concept of “ordain”?** This writer knows of no other concept that has suffered so much in the process of Bible translation. The King James Bible contains the word “ordain” and variants 23 times in the Old Testament and 20 in the New. The New International Version (NIV) uses it 28 times in the old and **only once in the New Testament**. If we compare the KJV and the NIV, they almost **never agree** on where “ordain” should be used! The only verse where both translations contain “ordain” is Psalm 8:2. Young’s Literal Translation, uses “ordain” only 3 times. The New English Bible (NEB) does not use “ordain” at all! A new translation due in 1999, *The Original Bible* (intended to convey the meaning of the original Bible) will not contain the word “ordain” either.

**EXPLANATION OF TABLES:** We have included the extensive tables on pages 17 and 18 so that you may see the “shotgun” approach to the use of “ordain” in seven significant translations. The first five translations are some of the most widely used translations today. Young’s and Green’s literal translations were included because their translation philosophy placed a greater emphasis on correct word-for-word renderings rather than on easy-to-read English phrases.

These tables contain all uses of the words “ordain”, “ordained”, and “ordination” in all seven translations. The tables are grouped by the Hebrew and Greek words so that their definition

did not need to be repeated. The word definitions were summarized to fit the available space from Strong’s Concordance as a general guide to meaning. Consult a Hebrew or Greek lexicon for a better definition. The Hebrew and Greek words appear in the order of the first scripture that uses them in the table. This provides a general sense of going through the Bible.

**These tables do not show cases where these same Hebrew and Greek words are not translated as “ordain”.** If they did, the tables would be larger than this entire paper. Nearly every Hebrew and Greek word in these tables is used in dozens or hundreds of verses **where it is not translated “ordain”**. You can use *The Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance* and *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance*, or a computer Bible program to find those thousands of occurrences. Simply look up the Strong’s number of each word in the concordance or computer Bible.

The only places where any translations exhibit any degree of consistency is with the Hebrew *millu* (Strong’s 4393). It occurs 15 times in the Old Testament, and is rendered “ordination” 11 times by the NIV, NRSV and NASB translations (see table). These usages are all related to installing or consecrating the high priest. The other four times, *millu* is rendered “mounting”, “set,” or “inlaid” because it refers to stones being installed in something (Ex 25:7; 35:9,27; 1Chr 29:2). A high priest was “installed” in his position much like a stone might be “installed” in its setting. This is the only case where any single Hebrew or Greek word was translated “ordain” more than half the time. This Old Testament usage gives no credence to the common understanding of “Church ordination”. The high priest of Israel was an inherited office chosen by the Eternal. There are no scriptures that say that the Old Testament priests were replaced by the New Testament ministry or leadership—the Bible teaches that all believers are priests (1Pet 2:5,9).

There are two Greek words which are translated “ordain” half the time. The Greek *diatage* (Strong’s #1296) appears twice in the New Testament. In Acts 7:53 it refers to the law given by “angels”, so the NRSV and NASB use “ordain”. But the same word is also used in Romans 13:2 where it refers to the Eternal’s choosing of secular rulers. Most Bible-believers agree that the Eternal determines our world leaders, but they would certainly not say he “ordains” them. Hence, *diatage* (Strong’s #1296) cannot be a Greek word representing the modern concept of ordination.





### All New Testament Occurrences of “Ordain” (& all variants) in 7 Significant Translations

(For explanation of this table, see description on page 16.)

Greek Word with Strong's Number and Brief Definition	Verses Where Rendered “Ordain”	King James Version (KJV)	New King James Version (NKJV)	New International Version (NIV)	New Revised Standard (NRSV)	New American Standard (NASB)	Young's Literal Transltn. (YLT)	Green's Literal Transltn. (GLT)
<i>Katartizo</i> #2675 - to render sound, complete	Matt 21:16 (O.T. quote)	perfected	perfected	ordained	prepared	prepared	didst prepare	perfected
<i>poieo</i> #4160 - to do, make	Mark 3:14	ordained	appointed	appointed	appointed	appointed	appointed	made
<i>titheimi</i> #5087 - to set, put, place	John 15:16 1Tim 2:7	ordained	appointed	appointed	appointed	appointed	did appoint	planted
<i>ginomai</i> #1096 - to become, to begin to be	Acts 1:22	be ordained	become	become	become	become	become	become
<i>diatage</i> #1296 - a disposition, arrangement, ordinance	Acts 7:53	by the disposition of	by the direction of	through	as ordained by	as ordained by	by arrangement of	by the disposition of
<i>horizo</i> #3724 - to define, to determine	Acts 10:42 Acts 17:26 Acts 17:31	ordained determined ordained	ordained determined ordained	appointed determined appointed	ordained allotted appointed	appointed determined appointed	ordained ordained ordain	marked out ordaining appointed
<i>tasso</i> #5021 - to put in order, to station	Acts 13:48 Rom 13:1	ordained ordained	appointed appointed	appointed established	destined instituted	appointed established	appointed appointed	appointed ordained
<i>Cheirotoneo</i> #5500 - to vote by stretching out the hand, to create, to appoint	Acts 14:23	ordained	appointed	appointed	appointed	appointed	appointed	handpicked
<i>krino</i> #2919 - to separate, to prefer, to deem, to determine, to judge	Acts 16:4	ordained	determined	reached	reached	decided upon	judged	determined
<i>eis</i> #1519 - into, unto, to, towards, for, among	Rom 7:10	ordained to	to bring	to bring	that promised	to result in	is for	was to
<i>proorizo</i> #4309 - to pre-determine, decide beforehand	1Cor 2:7	ordained	ordained	destined	decreed	predestined	fore-ordained	pre-determined
<i>diatasso</i> #1299 - to arrange, appoint, ordain, prescribe, Give order	1Cor 7:17 1Cor 9:14 Gal 3:19	ordain ordained ordained	ordain commanded appointed	rule [I] lay down commanded put into effect	is [my] rule commanded ordained	direct directed ordained	direct direct set in order	command ordained ordained
<i>Protoimadzo</i> #4282 - to make ready beforehand	Eph 2:10	before ordained	prepared beforehand	prepared in advance	prepared beforehand	prepared beforehand	did before prepare	before prepared
<i>kathistemi</i> #2525 - to set, place, put	Tit 1:5 Heb 5:1 Heb 8:3	ordain ordained ordained	appoint appointed appointed	appoint appointed appointed	appoint put in charge appointed	appoint appointed appointed	set down set appointed	appoint appointed set in place
<i>cheir</i> #5495 <i>epitithemi</i> #2007 - lay hands on	1Tim 5:22	lay hands...on	lay hands on	laying on of hands	ordain	lay hands upon	laying hands...on	lay hands...on
<i>kataskueazo</i> #2680 - to furnish, equip, prepare	Heb 9:6	ordained	prepared	arranged	preparations made	prepared	prepared	prepared
<i>entellomai</i> #1781 - to order, command to do, enjoin	Heb 9:20	enjoined	commanded	commanded	ordained	commanded	enjoined	enjoined
<i>prographo</i> #4270 - to write before (of time)	Jude 4	ordained	marked out	written about	designated	long beforehand marked out	written beforehand	of old marked out

Another Greek word, *cheirotoneo* (Strong's 5500) is also used twice in the New Testament. The KJV translates it “ordain” in Acts 14:23 where elders are being chosen for the various congregations. The Greek grammar indicates that Paul and Barnabas are doing the choosing, but it is unclear whether they were picking people by their own understanding or if they were conduct-

ing an election (more about that later). Nevertheless, *cheirotoneo* is also used in 2 Corinthians 8:19 when a **congregation chose** a person to accompany a donation to see that it was used properly. The fact that a group chose the person and that it was a temporary job is very much different than today's concept of ordination.

Young's Literal Translation deserves some

credit for consistency: the word “ordain” only appears three times in the whole version, each occurrence being translated from the Greek *horizo* (#3724). However, *horizo* also appears in five other places where it is translated “define”, “determine”, or “declare”. Apparently, the translators simply decided to write “ordain” in some verses where the Eternal was the One doing the “determining”.

With the exception of the cases noted in the above paragraphs, nearly every other use of the word “ordain” in nearly every translation is a decision made based on the translators’ perception of Christian doctrine. If the Eternal was doing something important, or if church responsibilities were being handed out, they sometimes wrote the word “ordain” instead of the more normal meaning of the Hebrew or Greek. This writer could not find any lexicon or commentary that claimed that any rendering of the word “ordain” came about due to idiom (combination of words with a special meaning) or other linguistic reason. There is no combination of words or particular tense or case of Greek or Hebrew words that are **uniformly rendered** “ordain”.

The translators felt a need to use it because it was such a big part of “Christian doctrine”—they fit it in the best that they could. The KJV is by far the worst example of forcing this word into the text. The translators used 12 different Hebrew words and 14 different Greek words to translate into “ordain”—the majority of those words are translated “ordain” only once in Scripture. Other translations have followed the King James practice, but to a much more limited degree. You can easily see this by looking at the number of black boxes on the charts. **There is not one verse where all seven of these translations agree.** In fact, there are only four verses where a majority (4 out of 7) of the translations agree to use “ordain” (Num 28:6; Psalm 8:2; Acts 10:42; Gal 3:19).

This complete disagreement among translators about when to use the word does not make sense for a doctrine that is so specific. This writer once attended a conference of a church group that was re-forming after having departed from a larger church group. They asked every “minister” there **if and exactly when** he was “ordained”. They were not interested in people who had been “chosen”, “appointed”, “asked”, “determined”, “called”, or even “inspired” to lead a congregation in the past. They wanted to know when they had been **“ordained”** and who “did it”. They did not necessarily accept “ordi-

nations” from people who were not closely related to their former group. One shudders to think how the questions and answers during this part of the conference could have progressed if the English language had a dozen words, all of which could sometimes mean “ordain”, but usually did not.

From all of this, we must conclude that the modern concept of ordination is not taught in the Bible. **There are no Hebrew or Greek words used in the Bible that express the concept understood by today’s meaning of “ordain”.** The Bible mentions people who receive the laying on of hands, who serve as leaders of congregations, and who command and teach others. But this common idea in many people’s minds is simply **not** in the Bible: “There is a class of ordained men who are the only ones authorized for certain spiritual functions and that they are the only ones allowed to approve others for positions of service in the congregation.”

Look over the two tables (pages 17 and 18). If you could speak Greek or Hebrew, were transported back to the first century, and decided to tell the apostles about the people who were “ordained” in our century, what Hebrew or Greek word would you use? Would you have to use a word that is not in the Bible? If you were going to use a biblical word, **could you use any from the two tables without being ambiguous?** You could use the Hebrew *millu* which was used for the consecration of the High Priest, but neither it nor a Greek equivalent is ever used for “ordaining” New Testament leaders. The Greek *hagiazō* translates “to set apart for a holy purpose” and sounds closer to the modern concept of “ordination”. But this word is usually translated “sanctify” and is often used to apply to all who are believers. It is not the Greek equivalent of today’s meaning of “ordain”. **However, this writer knows of no other biblical Greek word, phrase or idiom, that is closer in meaning.** If there is no way to talk to a first century believer about the “doctrine of ordination” by using biblical languages, can anyone believe that this doctrine existed when the Bible was written?

The Bible certainly mentions spiritual gifts of leadership given to some brethren, and public recognition of authority. But we must realize that the concept of “ordination” as generally understood today is not in the Bible. There simply is no word or group of words with this meaning. When we see the rules given the King James Bible translators, it seems evident that the spo-

radic inclusions of “ordain” in the translation was part of **Rule 3**, to retain the “old ecclesiastical words”—whether or not they were a good translation of the Hebrew and Greek! Today, if you were to study church government using the New English Bible, you could not explain “ordination” to anyone. The word is not there, nor will you find any similar word with that concept. (This Bible was not produced by some radical anti-organization group, but by many church groups of the United Kingdom. Its translators just happened to be honest in this particular area.) You would fair little better trying to explain “ordination” from the NIV New Testament—it appears only once—simply stating that the Eternal has “ordained” young people to praise Him (Matt 21:16).

In a later section, this paper will examine most of the scriptures that discuss the various leadership positions within the Church—the

**Note on Greek Expressions for “Laying on of Hands”:** All of the Greek expressions used in the verses discussed here are very similar, except for four places (Acts 8:18, 1Tim 4:14, 2Tim 1:6 and Heb 6:2). In these four verses, the Greek *epithesis* is used, the only four places it appears in the New Testament. Some Greek dictionaries have a note that this is equivalent to the Hebrew term for the practice of “receiving a special commission or blessing from the Eternal”. It is interesting to note that of the four verses that receive this “special treatment”, two are in regard to baptism, and two are in regard to spiritual gifts—none are specifically about “appointing leaders”. However, this Greek word cannot have too much of a different meaning than the more commonly used *epitithemi* (“to lay or put”) because the two are used interchangeably in Acts 8:17,18 and 19.

The KJV sometimes uses the expression “put hands on” instead of “laid hands on”, even though the Greek words are the same. It seems the KJV translators (maybe even King James) wrote “put” when a “less important” person was blessed or healed—they may not have wanted to mix their “church office” terminology with that used for “commoners”. The NKJV follows the KJV in this, but the NRSV, NASB and others do a much more consistent job of using “laying on of hands”.

It is interesting to see that the KJV translators invented the above distinction (“lay” vs. “put”) when there was no distinction in the Greek, but failed to differentiate between the Greek words that mean “laid” and those that mean “seized”. The KJV uses the exact same expression “laid hands on” for someone being blessed as for someone being apprehended for prison (Acts 4:3). But since there are no major doctrines based on these “seizing” verses, we will not mention them further.

spiritual body of believers. This paper will cite translations that attempt to accurately translate the meaning of the original Greek, rather than insert “old ecclesiastical words”. Hopefully, the reader will try to drop the “old ecclesiastical ideas” for this study and take a fresh look at what the Scriptures actually say.

### Is “Laying on of Hands” the same as Ordination?

The **laying on of hands** was used simply as a manner of blessing (Matt 19:13-15, Rev 1:17), to request granting of the Holy Spirit at baptism (Acts 8:17-19; 9:17; 19:6; Heb 6:2), for healing (Matt 9:18; Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23,25; 16:18; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 9:12,17; 28:8) and to request the imparting of spiritual gifts (1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6). While the subject is not specifically mentioned in James 5:14-16, these verses on healing say that elders should anoint the sick, a process that requires placing one’s hands on another’s head.

Also, the laying on of hands was used to pray for people being given a special function in the church—a public recognition of their responsibilities. In Acts 6:6, seven men, **who were already full of the Holy Spirit**, were chosen to serve tables, and the apostles laid their hands on them. But in the next two chapters, two of the seven (Stephen and Philip) were preaching on a massive scale. Hands were laid on Barnabas and Paul for a preaching mission in Acts 13:2-3, but that was not their “ordination into the ministry”—they had both preached extensively in previous chapters. There is no indication that it was any kind of new “title” or “rising” in “ministerial rank”. Finally, Paul cautioned Timothy to “not lay hands on anyone hastily” (1Tim 5:22). While the reason is not specifically given, the context is dealing with leaders and problems in the congregation.

The first two paragraphs in this section contain all of the references to the laying on of hands that are in the New Testament (except as noted in the box). There are references to the “laying on of hands” in the Old Testament, but most of them are about placing one’s hands on a sacrifice to confess sin (Lev 1:4; 4:15; etc.). There is at least one example of conferring a blessing (Gen 48:13-20) and commissioning a person with a new responsibility (Num 27:23). Kings and prophets were frequently commissioned by a command from the Eternal to anoint: a sort of “oily laying on of hands”. However, it is important to realize that there was no organizational system in the Old

Testament where leadership was passed from one man to the next by a continual line of laying on hands or anointing. Unless the Eternal specifically interfered:

- 1) Kings were succeeded by their sons or the person who killed them.
- 2) Priests were succeeded by their sons.
- 3) Judges and Officers were appointed by the people in each city—the same people who gave offerings (Deut 16:16-18).
- 4) Prophets were chosen directly by the Eternal.

There is no mention of church leaders being succeeded by their sons anywhere in the New Testament. So if we want to assume that any methods of choosing leaders were borrowed from the Old, it would be method #3 or #4, above. We can probably learn much more by looking at the New Testament scriptures:

The exhaustive list of New Testament scriptures, at the beginning of this section, shows that the greatest mention of “laying on of hands” is for **healing**. Receiving the Holy Spirit is second and recognition of responsibilities in the congregation is third. Let us notice some things that the Scriptures do **not say** about the “laying on of hands”:

- 1) That it is a part of “ordination”.
- 2) That it imparts a permanent position or gift. (Are healings or blessings permanent? John 5:14).
- 3) That it separates the “ministry” from the “laity”.
- 4) That it is required for a person to be any kind of church leader.

It is interesting to note that the Scripture says little about **who should lay hands on others**. While most of the scriptures show that Christ, the Apostles, and Timothy laid hands on others, there are exceptions. James 5:14-16 indicates that “elders” did it. Prophets did it in Acts 13:1-3. A “disciple” named Ananias laid hands on Paul in Acts 9:10-17. Finally, Mark 16:17-18 indicates that it is one of the things that “**believers**” will do. Some theologians teach that Philip baptized, but was not a “high enough rank” to lay on hands, therefore the apostles had to come and do it for him (Acts 8:12-23). However, this Scripture does not say that Philip could not do it or anything about why he did not, but simply that “the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them” (v 16). It is this writer’s opinion that the Eternal wanted a face to face meeting of Simon the Sorcerer and Peter. Also, if we read the rest of Chapter 8, we see that Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, and

preached in all of the cities of 70 miles of coast-line (v 40). It makes little sense that Philip would be used to preach to all these people, perform great miracles and signs (v 13), but not be able to lay hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit. If Philip could not lay hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit, does that mean that only apostles can perform that function? This possibility is disproved when Ananias was chosen by the Eternal to lay hands on Paul, after which he was healed and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:10-17). It does not say that Ananias was an apostle or some other “high rank”, nor that he was “over Paul”.

Lacking a clear command from the Scriptures, how can anyone set up rules to limit who can lay hands on whom? If the Eternal gave some kind of rules where only apostles or other “high-ranking” leaders could lay hands on others, why would He have bypassed these rules and taken a message directly to Ananias? The explanation is: “All these [spiritual gifts] are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (1Cor 12:11).

If we see the laying on of hands as a means of power and control, then it is indeed important to try to restrict who can do it. But if we see it as a means of confirming our desire for the Eternal’s blessing on a person—knowing that the laying on of hands means nothing unless the Eternal actually does bless, then the question, “who can lay on hands?” does not really matter much. The biblical practice of laying on hands is a physical event which sometimes accompanies the spiritual activity of prayer.

**If anyone can lay on hands, what will stop people from laying hands on each other for unscriptural or silly reasons?** What stops people from praying for unscriptural or silly reasons? Nothing! Both prayer and the laying on of hands are only meaningful when the Eternal takes action. Neither should be done insincerely or contrary to scripture. But this writer can see no scripture restricting any believer from laying hands on another individual to request a special blessing, a healing, or the imparting of the Holy Spirit after baptism. After all James 5:15 states “And the prayer **of faith** will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” If the person has true faith, the Eternal will do what He has promised.

### Ministers and Deacons Not Different

When the word “minister” appears in the KJV, it is usually translated from the Greek *diakonos* (noun meaning “servant” or “minister”) or

the *diakoneo* (verb meaning “to serve” or “to minister”). All occurrences of “deacon” and “deaconess” are translated from these same Greek words. There are no associated adjectives or other linguistic elements to signify a “spiritual” *diakonos* (minister) or a “physical” *diakonos* (deacon). The word is also used to describe servants who do physical work.

**Separate “offices” of “deacon and “minister” could not possibly have existed in minds of the New Testament writers if they used an identical word for both of them!** Can you imagine Paul “raising someone in rank” from a *diakonos* to a *diakonos*? The concept of church organizations separately “ordaining” people for spiritual service (ministers) or physical service (deacons) is nowhere in the New Testament.

Even though many Bibles contain both the word “deacon” and “minister”, you can see yourself from a concordance and a Greek Interlinear that they are writing something into the Bible that was not originally there. First, let us find out exactly what *diakonos* (and related words) really mean. In some cases, it is “a real working servant” and is so translated many times. One example: “but the **servants** who had drawn the water knew” (John 2:9). Most New Testament Historians agree that the Gospels were written later in the first century, probably after most of Paul’s letters. If *diakonos* had come to be an important religious title, the Gospel writers would not have used it so much for describing working people—they would have used *doulos* or some other Greek word for “servant”. Also realize that *diakonos* is also used to describe women. Martha “served” Jesus (John 12:2) and Phebe was a “servant of the Church” (Rom 16:1).

#### All Uses of 3 New Testament Greek Words

*diakonos* #1249, should be “**servant**”

*diakonia* #1248 should be “**service**”

*diakoneo* #1247 should be “**serve**”

Matt 4:11; 8:15; 20:26,28; 22:13; 23:11; 25:44; 27:55; Mark 1:13,31; 9:35; 10:43,45; 15:41; Luke 4:39; 8:3; 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26,27; John 2:5,9; 12:2,26; Acts 1:17,25; 6:1,2,4; 11:29; 12:25; 19:22; 20:24; 21:19; Rom 11:13; 12:7; 13:4; 15:8,25,31; 16:1,27; 1Cor 3:5; 12:5; 16:15; 2Cor 3:3,6,7,8,9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3,4; 8:4,19,20; 9:1,12,13; 11:8,15,23; Gal 2:17; Eph 3:7; 4:12; 6:21; Phi 1:1; Col 1:7,23,25; 4:7,17; 1Thess 3:2; 1Tim 1:12; 3:8,10,12,13; 2Tim 1:18; 4:5,11; Phm 1:13; Heb 1:14; 6:10; 1Pet 1:12; 4:10,11; Rev 2:19.

This writer believes that the Bibles would be much better understood if the three Greek words

in the box, above, were consistently translated as “servant”, “service”, and “serve”. If you have any doubt, please read them all and see. While the actual usage of these three Greek words do vary a little, it would still be better understood in English if we had to determine the meaning by the usage, rather than by allowing Bible translators to make the decision for us—choosing different English words for the same Greek word and losing the underlying connection. All of the above verses make sense if “servant/service/serve” are used, provided that we understand service can be spiritual as well as physical.

Sometimes, using “servant” will shed new light on a scripture. For example, 2 Corinthians 3:6,8,9 (KJV) speaks of “ministers of the new covenant”, and the “ministration of the spirit” being more glorious than the “ministration of condemnation”. Because Paul is showing his leadership in the first three verses of the chapter, some have taken this chapter to be an explanation of the glory of being a “minister” (usually an “ordained minister”) of the New Covenant. However, if we compare these verses to Romans 6:16 which uses the Greek *doulos* for “servant”, the meaning is clear: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” The verses in 2 Corinthians 3 are talking about everyone serving (or being servants of) a “covenant of the Spirit”, rather than being servants under the Old Covenant. Verse 18 confirms that this section is about all believers, not just Paul and Timothy or “the ministry”: “But **we all**, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

There are some verses where the word *diakonos* (“servant”) clearly represents people who were specially designated as having a service function within the Church. Paul greets the “saints”, the “overseers” (“bishops”), and the “servants” (*diakonos*) (Phil 1:1). Also, 1 Timothy 3 gives qualifications for a “servant”. **If there were never any kind of recognition of a person as a *diakonos* (“servant”), then what need would there be for qualifications?** But the position is not one of authority or spiritual capability as most church organizations use it. It is one of service to others (possibly a paid position in some cases, but there is no biblical example or proof of it.) The main emphasis of the

word is “doing **work** for the brethren”. Paul calls himself a *diakonos* and backs it up with evidence (2Cor 6:4-10; 11:22-28). His evidence is not an “ordination”, the “laying on of hands”, the number of people “under him”, or any such thing. His evidence is the number of things he suffered serving the brethren and preaching the Gospel. Indeed, there is no scripture—even a mistranslation—that ever shows where anyone was “ordained” or had hands laid on them to become a *diakonos* (minister/deacon/servant).

The Eternal could have inspired the New Testament church to choose or make any word that He wanted to for this function. He could have chosen: “ruler”, “boss”, “captain”, “sergeant”, “know-it-all”, “Christ’s representative”, “holy person”, etc. But, He inspired “servant”. The “offices” used in modern church organizations are indeed much closer to Catholic practice than they are to biblical directives.

How many church organizations today would be interested in dropping their titles of “minister” and “deacon” and calling these men “servants”? The word may sound too demeaning for the position—which probably indicates our concept of the position is different than that found in the Scripture. We will discuss more about the type of leadership the Bible describes in a later section.

### Other King James Translation Errors

#### Self-appointed “Minister” (Servant):

“...ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted [**appointed**] themselves to the ministry [**service**] of the saints” (1Cor 16:15, KJV). The Greek *tasso* everywhere else in the New Testament is translated as “appointed”, “determined” or some other decision-making word that fits its Greek meaning. This writer checked numerous translations and nearly every one had a different English word in this verse. Apparently, the translators knew what *tasso* meant, but did not want to write something against the doctrines of so many churches—so they had to “come up with something”. Green’s Literal Translation has it right: “and they **appointed** themselves to ministry to the saints.” If Christ really governs his Church, is it unreasonable that He either allowed or inspired the household of Stephanas to serve the brethren? What is important, that men approve Stephanas’ service, or that the Eternal approve it?

Obviously, many “servants” of the Church were selected by the recommendation of the

brethren and/or the appointing by already established leaders. But that was not an excuse for translators to obscure this clear case of self-appointing. There are other cases where important functions in the church were initiated by an individual deciding to do it. Apollos began teaching on his own, but was later accepted by Paul and the brethren (Acts 18:24-28; 1Cor 3:6). Also, notice that Paul tells Timothy: “This *is* a faithful saying: If a man **desires** the position of a bishop [overseer], he desires a good work” (1Tim 3:1).

#### Selective Translation Bolsters “Bishop”:

The various spiritual gifts listed in the Bible were usually described by plain, everyday words in Greek. The KJV translators should have used plain, everyday English words to translate them. But because King James instructed them to use old church terminology, they inserted the old Catholic words for church offices. This practice leaves the English reader to believe that the Scriptures actually support church offices rather than the various spiritual gifts mentioned.

The Greek *episkopos* is translated “bishop” in four places in the KJV (Phil 1:1, 1Tim 3:2, Tit 1:7, 1Pet 2:25), where it apparently applies to only a few men—matching the authoritarian Catholic Church concept of a “boss over many congregations.” It is translated “overseer” (its true meaning) in Acts 20:28 where Paul was addressing many elders of Ephesus (vv. 17-18). The KJV translators would have a hard time if they wrote “bishop” here, because the Catholic concept of “bishop” usually involved only one per city. (The American Standard Version, produced much later, is at least consistent and contains “bishop” here). However, “overseer” would be a much better translation for *episkopos* if we understand it as “someone who looks out for the welfare of others”, not “someone who bosses others”. (See the latter section on “Elders, Overseers, Pastors”).

#### Other Religious “Titles” Enhanced:

The Greek *poimen* is translated “shepherd” 16 out of 17 times in the KJV. In Ephesians 4:11, it is translated “Pastor” where there is a list of spiritual gifts that Christ gives to His body. That is the only verse where “pastor” (or any variant) occurs in any major Bible translation. The YLT and Darby say “shepherd” here. There are no other modifying words or other linguistic features that indicate that this is some kind of title or church office. Even when the word is used to

refer to Christ (John 10:2,11,12,14,16; Heb 13:20; 1Pet 2:25), it is always translated “shepherd” by nearly every translation. Why? Probably because *poimen* (“shepherd”) is mentioned with “sheep” in the immediately adjoining verses in nearly every case but Ephesians 4:11. Since there is no church office corresponding to “sheep”, the translators had to keep the obvious meaning and write “shepherd”. Certainly, there is a spiritual gift of “shepherd”—one who leads and guides brethren as a shepherd guides sheep. This is the task of “overseers” or “elders”. But we should not take a modern day definition of “pastor” from a dictionary or church doctrine book and read it back into the Bible. Much of what people expect of a pastor in a typical church organization should be accomplished through spiritual gifts shared among many brethren.

Some church organizations use the term “**evangelist**” as an ecclesiastic “rank” or title. The Greek word is *euaggelistes* and appears three times in the New Testament (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; 2Tim 4:5). But unless you use some kind of Greek Bible help, most translations do not clearly show that *euaggelistes* is from *euaggelion* which is almost always translated “Gospel”. The word *euaggelistes* should be translated “Gospel-preacher”—clearly connecting the relationship between the two words. In two out of three places, the YLT accurately has “proclaimer of good news”.

The KJV translators did well by not including the terms “**layman**” or “**lay member**” and “**clergy**” into the Bible. Of course, there are no words in the Greek texts that have the meaning of those English words. However, they have crept into modern translations in one or two places.

**Creative Insertion of the Word “Office”:** In their efforts to bolster “church offices”, the King James translators inserted the word “office” into a few verses for no apparent linguistic reason. In **Romans 11:13**, “office” was used for the Greek *diakonia*, elsewhere translated “service” or “ministry”. In **Romans 12:4**, “office” is inserted for the Greek *praxis*, instead of “function, deed or work”. The phrase “use the office of deacon” appears in **1 Timothy 3:10,13** where “be servants” (same as “ministers” or “deacons”) would be better. These errors were so blatant and obvious that nearly every modern translation has corrected them: the word “office” does not appear in these passages.

**“All Authority” Inserted into Titus 2:15:** The KJV reads: “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with **all authority**. Let no man despise thee”. In English, it sounds like Paul is telling Titus that he has “all authority” over the brethren—as a king or dictator might. The Greek words for “all authority” are *pas* and *epitage*. The latter word is used five other times in the New Testament (Rom 16:26; 1Cor 7:6,24; 2Cor 8:8, 1Tim 1:1, Tit 1:3) In all of these cases *epitage* is translated “commandment” and refers to a commandment of the Eternal. The incorrect use of “authority” makes it sound like Titus was the rebuking authority, not the Eternal’s commandments. Also, the Greek *pas* is translated “every” 117 out of 1243 times. When *pas* is used with a word that represents a “class of items”, *pas* refers to “every item in the class.” This verse would be much more consistently translated if it said “**rebuke with every commandment**”. Titus was to correct the brethren using every commandment of the Father and Christ.

**Matthew 16:18-19 Mistranslated:** The first part of this translation error is known to many. “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter [*petros*—small stone], and upon this rock [*petra*—large massive rock] will I build my church.” The Greek shows **the Church is not built on Peter but on Christ**. The KJV, with no distinction between the size of rocks, leads us to believe that the Church was built upon Peter and, by deduction, his successors. (Most top “church leaders” in big organizations claim to have Peter’s authority in some way.)

Verse 19 is also mistranslated. The Greek here is difficult, but any interlinear will show that there are words in the Greek text which do not appear in most English versions. The KJV says “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This sounds as though the Eternal will bind whatever Peter says to bind—whether it agrees with the Eternal’s word or not. However, Young’s literal translation is more clear: “whatever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be, having been bound in the heavens, and whatever thou mayest loose upon the earth shall be, having been loosed in the heavens.” This version gives Peter permission to bind and loose things on Earth, **as long as they are bound or loosed in heaven**. This exact same wording is given in Matthew 18:18 where the same power is given to all of the disciples (many more people than the 12 apostles).



**Probable Voting References Suppressed:**

The Greek *cheirotoneo* literally means “stretching forth the hand”. In Greek literature of about 100 B.C., it certainly meant “selecting by show of hands”—voting. This author could not find an applicable reference work that disagreed with this fact. However, some references concluded that the word had changed meaning over the years to simply “appointed”. One cited Josephus’ Antiquities XIII 2:2 which contains a letter from Alexander, son of Antiochus Epiphanes, where he, of his own decision “appoints” (*cheirotoneo*) Jonathan as high priest. But does this example prove that *cheirotoneo* had changed in meaning, or is Alexander simply misusing the word to make his unlawful action look lawful? The new high priest was supposed to be the son of the last high priest—if no son existed a vote was often taken to decide the next priest. Would not Alexander write a nice word that meant “selected by show of hands” so that Jonathan could at least pretend to be a legitimate elected high priest, rather than a puppet? (Some present-day countries still hold mock elections and refer to some officials as elected, even though they are all appointed by a dictator.)

The two verses that use *cheirotoneo* are: “And when they had ordained [selected by show of hands] them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23). “And not that only, but who was also chosen [selected by show of hands] of the churches to travel with us with this grace...” (2Cor 8:19). Weymouth’s New Testament in Modern Speech (By Richard Francis Weymouth, Harper & Row), does use the expression “selected by show of hands” in both of these verses. Adam Clarke’s and other commentaries agree with this translation. The Greek grammar indicates that Paul and Barnabas did the “selection by show of hands” in Acts, but it is possible that they simply conducted the election. However, in 2 Corinthians, it is clear that **the congregation** selected the person.

From a historical perspective, we must realize that most Jews of that day accepted the idea of voting—in the synagogues and in the Sanhedrin. This is not to say that the Early church was a “democracy”, and that people voted for every position—but it was apparently used sometimes. If Christ taught the apostles that voting was wrong, we would expect that they would have had to teach that idea to all the congregations. Why, then, would Luke and Paul have used the word *cheirotoneo*, a word that clearly meant “to vote”

in Greek literature that was written only 100 years earlier?

**Ekklesia Translated “Church” Instead of “Congregation” or “Assembly”:** This is yet another case of choosing old theological terms to keep the people in line, rather than choosing the best translation. The Greek *ekklesia* simply meant assembly; it did not imply a specific “church building” or “church organization” like the word “church” does today. Of interest, *ekklesia* is translated “assembly” three times in Acts 19:32,39,41, once for a “lawful assembly”, and twice for a rather unruly mob. “And some cried one thing and some another, for the **assembly** [*ekklesia*] was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together” (v 39). It is also used in Hebrews 2:12, a quotation from Psalm 22:22 to translate from the Hebrew *qahal*, which is usually translated “congregation” in the Old Testament. “Congregation” or “assembly” would have been a much better translation to use in all cases as the Darby Bible, and YLT, and Geneva Bible (1500’s) have done.

King James was still the head of the Church of England, and was well aware of the “wild things” that were happening on the continent, such as people assembling in houses (Rom 16:5; 1Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 1:2), without a Catholic priest—or any clergymen at all. King James did not want to be under the Pope, but neither did he want his subjects to think they could simply assemble together on their own to worship. He did not want to get away from the historical idea of “the church” as an official building with an “ordained clergy”.

(*Note: For clarity in this paper, we use the term “congregation” to represent a local assembly of brethren, and “Church” for the entire body of Christ. In English, the word “congregation” does not mean many scattered groups of people, but “church” can mean that. If the KJV translators had consistently translated the Greek *ekklesia* as either “congregation” or “assembly”, one of those words would be used by Protestants instead of “church” today.*)

**Kingdom Conflict:** Luke 17:21 was translated “the kingdom of God is within you” to perpetuate the teaching that the church was the “Kingdom of God” on earth. It was easy to push this deception on people who could not read the Bible for themselves and see the many parables about the Kingdom coming in the future, or read

the context and see the Savior was not talking to his disciples but to antagonistic Pharisees. The Greek *entos* is also used in Matthew 23:26 where it describes things contained by a plate and cup but not embedded inside the material of the plate and cup. Luke was referring to our Savior, standing **among** the Pharisees, not to something inside each one of the Pharisees. The NRSV correctly states: "...the kingdom of God is **among** you."

**In Reference to "Arguments from Silence"**: Many readers will have noted multiple uses, above, of statements like: "no scripture mentions 'ordination' to become a 'minister'", "the 'office of pastor' is not found in the Scriptures", etc. Some will say that these are "arguments from silence"—just because the Bible does not say something does not mean it is untrue. For example, the Bible does not say that the Earth is the third planet from the Sun, but it is. Also, much of what we know about the Roman empire is not from the Bible. There are many other examples. However, when it comes to understanding how the Eternal governs, **it is very important to know what the Bible does not say!**

Once a person comes to realize that most modern-day church offices and organizations are not based on biblical instruction, then two good things happen: **1)** It quickly becomes evident that most modern day "church offices" and "church governments" are creations of the Catholic Church and her successors. **2)** It is much easier to look into the Bible and read what it does say about how Christ governs His people. If you are willing to accept a church government because you are used to it being done a certain way, and because the Bible does not specifically condemn that way, then this paper may not change your mind much. However, if your desire is to let Christ lead His Body the way He said He would lead it in the Bible, then you will probably realize that the traditional "church organization" is not what He commanded.

**Did the New Testament Writers add New Concepts to Old Greek Words?** Some church leaders defend their organizations by claiming that there were no Greek words capable of expressing the new "church" concepts, so the apostles had to appropriate existing Greek words and give them new meanings. Some will even go as far as claiming that these "new meanings" have been faithfully preserved by the Catholic

and other large churches, and that we can "read them into the Bible" on that basis. This idea is wrong. **The Scripture does not tell us about words that are given new meanings**—turned into titles of "church offices". Furthermore, secular church history shows that local "bishops" *gradually* concentrated their power over nearby congregations and that the "Bishop of Rome" gradually gained power over the other bishops. The earliest writings of the "church fathers" do not claim that they were filling hierarchical offices that Christ or the Apostle set up.

Every Greek-speaking person whom this writer has asked has confirmed that the Greek language is particularly suited to combining words to make new words. You can look in a concordance's dictionary or in a lexicon and see that a high percentage of the Greek words are a combination of two or more other Greek words. One example is *archisunagogos*, the Greek word meaning "ruler of the synagogue" (Mark 5:22,35,36,38; Luke 8:49; 13:14,15; Acts 13:15; 18:8,17). This is undoubtedly a word coined by Jews who had learned to speak Greek—they did not simply want to use the Greek word for "king" or "ruler," "priest," etc.—they wanted a word that adequately described the position. However, **the New Testament does not contain any "new" Greek words invented for "church offices"**. We do not have a "ruler of the congregation", "head of the congregation", "spiritual-leader" or even a "spiritual servant". Those Scriptures that describe leadership in the Church simply describe what the leaders did in every-day terms, they do not set up "leadership positions to be filled".

### **What Is "The Church" Today and What Has It Been in the Past?**

We cannot possibly reach a biblical conclusion on church government unless we know what "The Church" is. We have already explained that the Greek word translated "church" is *ekklesia* and that it simply means *assembly*. It **was not an exclusively religious term**. Unmodified, the Greek *ekklesia* or "church" refers to the entire body of believers as in Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church [*ekklesia*] and gave Himself for it." Other times it refers to a local congregation in a certain area: "To the church [*ekklesia*] which is at Corinth" (1Cor 1:2). The plural form is used to refer to multiple congregations: "so that we ourselves boast to you among the churches [*ekklesia*] of God" (2Thes 1:4).

Colossians 1:13-18 makes it clear that the “Church” is the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12 shows there is one body with many members. “...Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Rom 8:9). **We must have His Spirit to be part of His Body.** 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 provides some interesting insights: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries [services to others—*diakonia*], but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.” To summarize, it is the spirit inside a person that makes him or her a part of the Body of Christ—the Church, but members of the church may be involved in a great diversity of activities.

So how, then, do we relate this definition of “the Church” to the hundreds of “church organizations” that exist today? Is there one organization that is the “true Church”? Or, do multiple organizations make up the “true Church”? The truth of the matter is that **the Bible says nothing about the formation of church organizations.** If a church organization refuses to recognize brethren as equals who are “outside the organization”, then it is creating division contrary to Scripture. When the brethren in Corinth began to recognize one Bible teacher as preeminent over the others, Paul told them to stop it (1Cor 1:10-13; 3:1-23). Paul did not tell the Corinthians that they were “not in the church” because they were looking to individual leaders, but he told them they were “babes in Christ” and “carnal” (1Cor 3:1,3).

Today, we find that most people who claim to be Christians are members of some church organization. Some feel their group is the “only true church” or that it is at least somehow better than the others. Making this mistake does not mean that they are **not a part** of the True Church, but neither does church organization membership assure anyone that they **are a part** of the True Church. We are not given the job of determining who is and who is not a part of the True Church (James 4:11-12). If others hold doctrines we believe are wrong, or if their life is a poor example, we may decide not to fellowship with them. But no person is given the authority to determine who is and who is not a member of Christ’s True Church. When the sinning member in 1 Corinthians 5:2-7 was put out by the congregation, it was done so **his spirit might be saved.** He was put out of the local congregation, but the Scripture does not say that the Spirit of Christ was taken away from him or that he was severed from Christ’s body. Later, he repented and returned to

the congregation (2Cor 2:5-8).

Someone may say, “I agree with your definition of the Church from the Bible, but we are commanded to assemble with brethren (Heb 10:25) and the only place I can do that is at a service sponsored by a church organization. Is it a sin to go?” The answer is “No”! The apostle Paul attended numerous synagogues. He prayed and sang with them, listened to them speak and they listened to him speak. Some gladly received his preaching of Jesus, others beat him up or threw him out. Similarly, a believer today who understands that church organizations are unbiblical may be able to happily fellowship with some of them, but others may ask about his or her different beliefs and then “put him (or her) out”.

For those who decide to attend services sponsored by an organization, please note that **we are not saying that one organization is as good as another.** Some church organizations have a high respect for the Bible and will consider the presentation of ideas based strictly on the Bible. Other church organizations teach only their established doctrine—some count their own traditions as equal in authority to the Bible. It is difficult to learn or even speak about much truth in the latter types of organizations. If you have to choose between several organizations for fellowship, you will need to pray about it, and then choose the group where you can learn and serve the most. It is possible that there are church organizations where most of the people have the Spirit of Christ. It is also possible that there are organizations where nobody has that Spirit.

Some people may be uncomfortable with the idea of scattered brethren—that there is no “church membership role” anywhere in the world identifying the true members of the Church. But note how the Eternal answered Elijah when he thought he was the only one left who was faithful to the Eternal (1Kngs 19:14): “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1Kngs 19:18). Elijah was a great prophet, yet he did not know about these righteous people, nor did the Eternal even tell him where they were. We can rest assured that our Father in heaven is carefully maintaining that information in the Book of Life (Phil 4:1-3). This book will be used to make sure that everyone is judged fairly (Rev 20:12,15).

Also some people may be uncomfortable with the idea that members of the true Church are scattered among groups and do not all hold the same doctrines. However, letters to the seven different

congregations (Rev 1:11; chapters 2-3) show beyond any doubt that members and congregations can have different doctrines and still be part of the True Church. This is the only view that seems historically possible. There is no known church organization that has existed from the first century until now that has had the same doctrines the entire time. There is not even a historically-verifiable **set of doctrines** that have always been held by some people (regardless of organizational affiliation) for 1900 years. Every organization and every “movement of thought” varied to some degree in their doctrine—depending on whether they were learning more or sliding into error. We will simply have to trust Christ to straighten it all out in the end. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

### Christ Is the Head

When people learn of a church group, one of the first questions they ask is, “Who is the head of it?” The answer should come from the Bible: “**...Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior**” (Eph 5:23, KJV). But when people are asking this question about a **specific church organization**, the question they want answered is: “Who is the **human head** of the organization?” But, if our success or very salvation depends upon how well we follow the human head of a church organization, is it not amazing that the New Testament never contains a single statement about a “human head of the Church”? **Would the Eternal really let our salvation hang on a concept not explained in the New Testament?** It is much more difficult to believe in a leader whom we cannot see (John 20:29). But if we have a close relationship with our Savior and really believe that He lives in us and leads us, we should be able to follow Him whether we have a human to teach us or not:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may **give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation** in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:17-18).

That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into **Him who is the head—Christ** (Eph 4:14-15).

The mystery which has been hidden from

ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory (Col 1:26-27).

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. for it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings** (Heb 2:9-10).

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and **you do not need that anyone teach you**; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him (1Jn 2:27).

It should be clear from these verses that Christ is the Head, and that He works with each person in His Body, the Church.

### There is Leadership: Apostles & Prophets are Foundation

Let us examine the main scriptures that indicate there is leadership in the Church.

[The household of God] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:20-22).

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, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, **to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men**, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ... (Eph 4:11-15).

And **God has appointed** these in the

church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations ["governments" in KJV], varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts... (1Cor 12:28-31).

These verses leave no doubt that Christ is the Head, and the apostles and prophets are the principal leaders of the Church. In addition, we see many other spiritual gifts given to the brethren—not just to the apostles or “ministry” (see also Rom 12:3-8 and 1Cor 12:1-11). Paul told everyone to desire these gifts. He gave some relative order to three of these gifts in the last passage—listing apostles first as they were taught directly by Christ, prophets second as they speak for the Eternal, and teachers third because they have the critical task of teaching the brethren.

Since all of these lists of gifts differ, it is difficult to believe Christ had ever given a specific “list of Church offices in hierarchical order”. If so, why were not evangelists and pastors listed before teachers in the last passage? Also, are we to assume that miracle workers are in charge of the healers, the helpers in charge of the administrators, etc? Obviously not!

The Scriptures do not say that we must “lay hands on” men before they can do any of the jobs in these lists. However, there are several examples of the laying on of hands for some of these jobs (serving widows in Acts 6:6, Barnabas as an apostle in Acts 13:3; 14:14, and Timothy as an Evangelist in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 4:5). We can find no scriptures against the modern day practice of laying hands on men for specific duties in our congregations, as long as we realize that this is not a permanent “rank”—that situations do change.

The purpose of all these gifts is highlighted in **boldface** in the second passage, above. They are not to control the believers, but to equip the saints (members) for the work of the service, so they attain the “fullness of Christ” and so they will not be fooled when tricky men come with false doctrines. Unfortunately, too many organizations have taken the opposite approach; they try to “shelter the flock” so they never hear or see any wolves, and make them completely dependent upon the “shepherds” for everything. Our Savior said He wanted all of us to be like Him (Matt 5:48; John 17:20-23). Human shep-

herds sometimes die, become transferred, lose their job, or turn into wolves. The purpose of spiritual gifts is to train all the brethren to be able to be like their Elder Brother, so they can stand both now and in the Kingdom.

### What Makes an Apostle?

The Greek word used for “apostle” in the New Testament is *apostolos*. It means “one sent”. “Emissary” or “envoy” are acceptable translations. (The JNT translation uses “emissary” instead of “apostle”.) Its most common usage in the Bible is to designate those whom Christ specifically called to be witnesses to His work: “He [Jesus] called His disciples to *Himself*; and from them He chose twelve **whom He also named apostles**” (Luke 6:13). Also: “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). In these verses, “apostle” is used as a title—an official appointment by Christ.

But it is essential to realize that the Greek *apostolos* is also used to describe other “sent” individuals—who are not apostles in the above sense. “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is **he who is sent** [*apostolos*] greater than he who sent him” (John 13:16). In this verse, *apostolos* is used as a general term for anyone who is sent. Also: “...if our brethren *are inquired about, they are* messengers [*apostolos*] of the churches, the glory of Christ” (2Cor 8:23). Here, all the brethren are referred to as “apostles of the churches”. In a sense, every member represents his or her congregation. Please note that the term “apostle of Christ” is **not** used here.

There is one more case where *apostolos* is used for someone who was not a direct witness of Jesus. “Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but **your messenger** and the one who ministered to my need” (Phil 2:25). The text clearly states that Epaphroditus was “one sent” **by the Philippians**; he was not “one sent of Christ”.

Most of the uses of the Greek *apostolos* require no guesswork as to who is the one doing the sending. Paul explicitly states he is “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead).” All these other references to “apostles” also specifically indicate that they “were sent” and specifically chosen “of Christ” (John 15:16; 1Cor 1:1; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1Thes 2:6; 1Tim 1:1;

2Tim 1:1; 2Tim 1:10-11; Tit 1:1; 1Pet 1:1; 2Pet 1:1; 3:2; Jude 17). There is no chance that Christ's apostles were appointed or elected by other men. **When the scriptures tell us the Church is founded on the "apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:20) it must be referring to divinely appointed apostles and prophets, not those who are self-appointed or appointed of other men.**

The original twelve were chosen directly by Christ after an all-night prayer (Luke 6:12-13). "And He appointed twelve, that they might be **with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons**" (Mark 3:14-15). It is important to realize that these apostles were never told that they were the human heads of church government or that they were to begin a "church organization". They were called to witness Christ's work and then demonstrate His power and truth to others. Christ repeated this purpose to the apostles shortly before His death. "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:27).

After Christ's death, the disciples realized they should replace Judas. They remembered what Christ said about the purpose of an apostle. "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Peter spoke this purpose, but "**they,**" the 120 disciples (Acts 1:15,23) recognized it and found two men that met the qualifications: Barsabas and Matthias. Yet, they did not take it upon themselves, nor did Peter take it upon himself, to "appoint" a new apostle. They prayed for the Father's decision and they cast lots (see page 62 for more detail).

The original twelve apostles were sent to Israel. Later, it seems that "James, the Lord's brother" was considered an apostle (Gal 1:19). (He should not be confused with James the son of Zebedee or James the son of Alphaeus.) James, being from Christ's own family certainly could bear witness to Christ in a way that most others could not.

Even though the apostle Paul was not with Christ during his early ministry, he was still called and taught directly by Christ. Parts of the story are related several places with varying details (Acts 9:1-19; Acts 22:6-21; Gal 1:11-24). Paul was chosen and taught directly by revelation from Christ for three years—a substitute for not having been

with Him on earth (Gal 1:1,12,18). Paul and Barnabas were sent to the Gentiles. When Paul had to show his qualifications compared to some other "most eminent apostles," he did not claim he was "head" of the Gentile converts and that "God's government" was through him. He told them the "**signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds**" (2Cor 12:12). This is consistent with the many miracles of the original apostles.

In Acts 14:14 Barnabas is referred to as an apostle. He appears to be an apostle of Christ in the same way as the others. He was chosen by a revelation of the Holy Spirit:

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, **the Holy Spirit said**, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:1-3).

While the Scripture does not specifically say that Barnabas was with Christ during his earthly teaching, there is a very strong indication. Right after Christ's death, Barnabas sold his land and gave the money to the other apostles (Acts 4:36-37). He must have known them for some time in order to give such a large part of his wealth to them. Also, the apostles must have known him well as they gave him a new name. Finally, we find that Barnabas had the "signs of an Apostle"—he was used to work miracles and wonders (Acts 15:12).

The New Testament also speaks clearly of **false apostles** (2Cor 11:13, Rev 2:2). It appears that some were calling themselves "most eminent apostles" (2Cor 11:5; 12:11), but Paul gives them credit for nothing worthwhile. Since Paul states he was an apostle "not through men... but through Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:1), some must have claimed to have been made apostles by men in some way. There is nothing positive recorded about these other apostles in Scripture.

Of course, there have been many people in many religions throughout history claiming to be apostles—maybe you know of some. **However, this writer has never heard or read of anyone who claimed to receive all of his teaching directly from Christ, and who performed the signs and wonders of the original apostles.**

Some modern “apostles” may claim a few meetings or visions with Christ; others claim great inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Most claim to learn “directly by the written word of Christ, the Bible”. These “taught by Christ” claims all fall apart when we see that these men failed to discern the errors in the King James or other translations. Nearly all of these “would-be apostles” teach that “ministers” are “ordained” for spiritual service and “deacons” are “ordained” for physical service. But the New Testament does not teach that. How does “an apostle” who claims to be divinely taught, teach a major doctrine that is in opposition to the original New Testament teaching? **The truth of the matter is that every human “apostle” alive today, whom this writer has heard of, has been taught mainly by the Bible, with occasional intervention by Christ.** Today, everyone reads a Bible with some textual and translation errors—errors which they are not always aware of. Being taught by the Bible is not the same as direct teaching through Christ.

This writer is not claiming to have a perfect understanding of the scriptures, either. This writer realizes that he could grow old and die before he will have a chance to study thoroughly every biblical issue, taking into account all of the significant Hebrew and Greek words, and all of the possibly related verses. The point of this section is that **we do not appear to have any human apostles in our day—people who were trained directly by Christ and who are used to perform great miracles.** If there were some, they would know from their training where our Bible translations differ from the teachings of Christ—without looking at the Hebrew and Greek! (We should be able to verify their teaching by study, of course.)

Even if the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures were perfectly understood, they do not contain everything that Christ taught (John 20:30; 21:25). The apostles spent three years with Him. The New Testament can be read in three days or studied in three months. Now it is quite possible that somebody will be trained directly by Christ and sent in the future to witness and perform miracles. This person would be an apostle in the sense of the original apostles. “Elijah” is prophesied to come and restore all things (Mal 4:5-6, Mat 17:11). The original Elijah performed many miracles; John the Baptist, a type of Elijah, performed no miracles (Matt 11:13-14, John 10:41).

Before concluding this section on apostles, we will examine **the authority of the apostles.** We already quoted the verses showing they were authorized to witness about Christ and to perform

miracles. Because of their time spent directly with Christ, the apostles (along with the prophets) were charged with teaching doctrine (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20; 3:4-5; 2Pet 3:2). When the Eternal grants this kind of authority, men can ignore it, but they cannot stop it. In numerous instances, the apostles were threatened, beaten, or jailed because of their teaching but the Eternal simply delivered them.

Some people will claim that Peter had life and death power over the believers based upon the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). However, these verses never say that it was Peter’s idea to put them to death. Peter said Ananias was lying to the Holy Spirit, and he simply died—the Eternal killed him. When Sapphira told the same lie, Peter told her she would die also. This was probably divinely revealed to him, but even if not, Peter was simply echoing a standard biblical principle of justice: identical punishments should be given for identical sins.

We have already discussed Matthew 16:18-19 on page 24 in our section on mistranslations. Here Christ says he will give Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven”. The context of these verses is Peter’s inspired understanding that Jesus was the Messiah. The “keys to the kingdom” were not human authority to decide who would be saved, but the understanding of the plan of how Christ would die to save Israel (one key) and later the Gentiles (the second key revealed to Peter in Acts 10-11). Notice the verses that follow: “Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt 16:20-21). The “transfiguration” occurs in the next chapter. The binding and loosing authority given to Peter is no different from the authority given to all the disciples in Matthew 18:15-20. We have no indication that Peter had authority over other apostles or that his “office” transferred to another at his death.

The purpose for binding and loosing in these verses is nearly identical with the principles used by Moses in Exodus 18:15-16. When brethren have a dispute they cannot settle, they go to the designated leaders for a binding judgment. There is no dictatorial power over the congregation granted. The power was to make decisions on matters that people bring to the leader.

The New Testament records numerous instructions given to brethren and all leaders. However, it does not record the apostles threatening

others with punishments for disobedience. We find Apollos making his own local decision apart from Paul's command: "Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, **but he was quite unwilling to come at this time**; however, he will come when he has a convenient time" (1Cor 16:12). In Acts 15:36-41, Paul and Barnabas agreed on a trip they both should take. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, Paul did not. They could not agree so they separated from each other. Paul did not proclaim Barnabas "insubordinate", or "put him out" of the Church.

The entire chapter of 2 Corinthians 11 is about the "most eminent apostles" who were misleading the Corinthians, yet claiming more authority over them than Paul had. If Christ had set up Paul as a kind of ruler over Gentile believers, that was the time for Paul to claim his apostolic authority. But what does Paul do? He shows them how much he suffered to preach the Gospel (2Cor 11:16-33). In several other scriptures, apostles plead with others to listen (1Cor 4; 10). There are no scriptures where the apostles threaten others for simply questioning them.

If the apostles did not have dictatorial authority over the members, does that mean His Church is disorganized? Of course not! Many brethren recognized the unique position of the Apostles and cooperated willingly! Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 show that the Body of Christ is organized and leadership is a gift to be exercised. The preaching of the Gospel and Sabbath services were to be organized activities (Rom 15:19-20; 1Cor 14:33,40). People helped the "ministers" as they were able (Col 4:7-17), but when they were not strong enough to serve in a way that an apostle asked, the apostle prayed for them rather than "putting them out of the church" (2Tim 4:16). Apostles cannot bear fruit for us, it is up to each one of us how much fruit we will bear (Matt 25:14-30; 1Cor 3:13-15).

### **Prophets—In the New Testament?**

Before starting, we should first know the purpose of a prophet. Prophets speak **directly-inspired messages** about the Eternal's way and what He is going to do (Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Dan 9:6; Amos 3:7). There are dozens of examples throughout the Bible. Women can be prophets, or more properly "prophetesses". Examples of prophetesses include Deborah (Jdgs 4:4), Miriam (Ex 15:20), Huldah (2Kgs 22:4), Anna (Luke 2:36) and Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).

The Eternal usually reveals His message to

the Prophet in a dream or a vision (with a few notable exceptions such as Abraham and Moses, whom He spoke with face to face (Gen 18:1; 20:7; Num 12:6-8; Matt 2:12-13). In the New Testament, some prophets apparently spoke through the power of the Holy Spirit—not seeing or hearing anything in a vision (Acts 13:1-4; 15:32; 1Cor 14:29). In either case, the prophet speaks the message, and people may or may not listen. Prophets may anoint leaders, but the anointed leader does not continue to take orders from the prophet. Prophets speak what the Eternal give them—it is not the prophet's purpose to interpret what the Eternal gives him or use his own best guess if the Eternal does not give him a message. The Eternal sometimes works continually through a specific prophet, allowing other men to "inquire of Him" through that prophet (1Sam 9:9; 1Kngs 22:7; 2Kngs 3:11). Other prophets seem to prophesy only once (Jdgs 6:7-10; 2Chr 15:1).

Prophets are still in control of themselves; they are free to disobey the Eternal, but it would be foolish to do that, just as it would be for you to disobey the Eternal (1Cor 14:32; Jonah 1:1-3). The Eternal has even temporarily put His spirit in prophets such as Balaam that knew they had to speak His message, but still did their best to defeat the Eternal's purpose (Num 22-24; 2Pet 2:15-16; Rev 2:14). The Eternal has always warned that there would be false prophets (Deut 13:3; 1Jn 4:1; Rev 2:20). He commands us to hear the true prophets and kill the false prophets; today, we remove them from our fellowship—the Church is not a civil government (Deut 18:19; 13:5).

In most church congregations today, prophets do **not** play a significant role. Some joke that their church group "is a **non-prophet** organization". Many groups explain the scriptures about the church being founded on "the apostles and prophets" as meaning the Old Testament prophets (1Cor 12:28-29; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11). This is impossible, as several of these scriptures clearly speak of prophets in the present tense and there are many New Testament prophets. Nevertheless, the following Scriptures are also sometimes cited to falsely claim that there are no prophets today:

God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained



a more excellent name than they (Heb 1:1-2,4).

The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail (Luke 16:16-17).

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men (1Cor 14:3).

The first passage does not declare the end of prophets, but simply shows the greatness and excellency of Christ compared to the knowledge revealed through the prophets and angels. Indeed, the Bible records many prophets after the death of our Savior as we will see. The second passage does not put an end to prophets any more than it puts an end to the law. There are many clear Scriptures that indicate the Eternal continued to speak through prophets after the resurrection of our Savior and will continue to do so through His return.

This last passage above shows **the effect of prophecy**, but does not define it. Prophecy does edify believers, but it is **not** defined as “anything that edifies”. Teaching and prophecy are mentioned as separate gifts (Acts 13:1; 1Cor 12:8-9; Eph 4:11). Most of the usage of the words “prophet” and “prophecy” (Greek *prophetes* and *propheteuo*) in the New Testament are references to the Old Testament prophets—men who heard His word. Many more uses are in the book of Revelation, a prophecy from Christ. Every place where we have the actual written message of a New Testament prophet, it is a miraculous revelation (John 11:48-52; Acts 11:27-30; 13:1-3; 21:10-11; Rev 1-22). Sermons are often wonderful examples of “teaching”, but teaching is not prophecy!

One of the reasons we do not have prophets in our congregations today is that we are not asking (James 4:2). Paul told the Corinthians: “Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order” (1Cor 14:39-40). At the other extreme, some people are continually asking for the gift of prophecy, but they either never prophesy or else prophesy erroneous things. We cannot judge their hearts, but we should never heed someone who prophesies things that do not come to pass. Another reason that we do not receive from the Eternal is because we ask for selfish motives (James 4:3). The Eternal may not grant the gift of prophecy to someone who would

use it to prove that people should follow him or join his group. The Eternal may also avoid giving the gift to those who simply want to look “spiritual”, who already have other gifts or who have significant sins to overcome first. Being a prophet is a difficult and sometimes dangerous job.

These Scriptures explain the extensive use of prophets in the New Testament:

And in these days **prophets** came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:28).

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain **prophets** and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:1-3). [It was not Peter that commissioned them.]

Now Judas and Silas, themselves being **prophets also**, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them (Acts 15:32). [Luke notes a less common occurrence: these men were teachers as well as “prophets also”.]

And as we stayed many days, a certain **prophet** named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” And when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.... So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:10-12,14). [The prophet spoke for the Eternal, but Paul made his own decision what he would do with the information.]

Let two or three **prophets speak**, and let the others **judge** [whether or not the message is from the Eternal (Deut 13:2; 18:22)]. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And **the spirits of the prophets**

**are subject to the prophets.** For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1Cor 14:29-33).

... as it has **now** [not 400 years ago] been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and **prophets**... (Eph 3:5).

And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.... And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two **prophets** tormented those who dwell on the earth (Rev 11:3,10).

Now I, John,... fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of **your brethren the prophets**, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God" (Rev 22:8-9).

Does this mean that anyone can stand up in any church service and say whatever they want claiming it is a prophecy? No, it should be done "decently and in order". Brethren need to learn about the role of a prophet, and the penalty of being a false prophet (Deut 18:20-22; Jer 14:14-15; 23:32-40). If a man unintentionally teaches an error in a sermon, a simple correction will take care of the problem. If a prophet teaches error and claims it was from the Eternal, he is in danger of the penalties for being a false prophet. If the "prophet" speaks against the word of the Eternal and does not repent, the congregation should put him or her out (see following sections).

Nevertheless, we must encourage the brethren to seek the Eternal and "desire earnestly to prophesy" (1Cor 14:39). When someone believes he has a message from the Eternal, we should let him or her speak and judge the prophecy against the Bible (1Cor 14:29). It is important to note that some prophets may also be teachers or some other kind of servant, and some may not (Acts 15:32).

Will someone claiming to be a prophet someday speak error in your congregation? With so many warnings of false prophets in both Old and New Testaments, the answer is most probably "yes". However, anyone who has attended church meetings for a long time will agree that they have heard a variety of ministers, teachers and preachers say things that are in error. (Read Ezekiel 34 if you think these men cannot go astray.) It is better to have a service where brethren are expected to

hear prophecies and judge them from the Scripture than one where they accept everything the leader says, or where there is no prophesying at all. Sometimes, the Eternal allows some error to be taught to find out who is studying (Deut 13:1-3; 1Cor 11:19; 2Pet 2:1). The only way members can be sure a teaching is right is by studying the Bible themselves (2Tim 2:15). Paul could have given instructions to avoid all prophesying (and all teaching for that matter) lest any error be taught; but he did not. We should not either.

### **Other Spiritual Gifts for All the Brethren**

We have seen that apostles and prophets are appointed by the Eternal, not by men. Throughout the Scriptures we find five lists of spiritual gifts, or service jobs in the Body of believers:

Having then gifts differing **according to the grace that is given to us**, let us use them; if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom 12:6-8).

But the manifestation of the Spirit **is given to each one** for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills (1Cor 12:7-11).

And **God has appointed** these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations ["governments" in KJV], varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding

brass or a clanging cymbal (1Cor 12:28-13:1).

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, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, **to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men,** in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ... (Eph 4:11-15).

And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. **As each one has received a gift,** minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him **speak as the oracles of God.** If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (1Pet 4:8-11).

Since no two of these lists are the same, it seems unlikely that there was any divinely-inspired “government plan” given to the first century believers. The apostles seem to mention the gifts that are pertinent to the issues before them at the moment. There may be other spiritual gifts granted to brethren in our present age. The gifts mentioned in the Bible are listed, below, in alphabetical order with the number of lists in which they appear. We have combined some different words into the category where the meaning and function seems similar—if someone has a reason to show us why the categories should not be combined, this writer would be interested to hear about it.

**Administrator, “One who Leads”, Pastor** (3). All of these words describe taking care of others and directing their work to some degree. These jobs appear to be essentially the same as elder and overseer, which are otherwise *not* mentioned in these gift lists. We know that elders work as shepherds (Greek means “pastors”) because elders are told to “shepherd the flock of God” (1Pet 5:1-2).

Other verses show that elders are overseers (Acts 10:17,28; Tit 1:5-9; 1Pet 1:1-2). Why are there so many names for essentially the same function? The reason is that these words all describe gifts and jobs, not some kind of office or spiritual title. Bible writers probably chose whatever word best described the function at the time—if they were emphasizing planning: “administrator” or “elder”, if they were emphasizing guiding of other people: “shepherd” or “overseer”. See the section on Elders, Overseers, Pastors below.

**Apostle** (2). Those sent by Christ as witnesses to His resurrection and teaching. These were covered extensively in the previous sections.

**Discerner of Spirits** (1). This gift is exceedingly valuable to a congregation, especially if Satan is attacking. Satan is very subtle and pretends to be a teacher of truth (2Cor 11:14). A person with the gift of “discernment of spirits” will usually know if a teacher, prophet, administrator, or tongue-speaker is full of the Holy Spirit or a clever counterfeit. This author has met a few people with this gift, but most congregations were ignorant of the gift, and the people found they could not mention the gift if they wanted to remain in the congregation.

**Evangelist or Gospel Preacher** (1). This word is mentioned only three times in Scripture: Philip (Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2Tim 4:5) were “doing the work” of an evangelist—they were preaching the Gospel to others. They were not “holding the office” of evangelist. Any person who successfully and continually preaches the Gospel to the world is an evangelist. A congregation or group of congregations can send a person to preach the Gospel:

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:14-15).

While a “Gospel preacher” may also teach in some congregations, the two gifts are not the same. An exhaustive concordance will show 98 references to the word Gospel and not one of them is about a message delivered only to a congregation (*ekklesia*). The Gospel” was always preached in public places and in synagogues containing unbelievers. Most references to Gospel preaching are about Paul’s work and

he states: “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation” (Rom 15:20).

**Exhorter** (1). This is a person who encourages, strengthens, inspires, motivates to do good, etc. “Exhorting” can be accomplished either by speaking in services or in private conversations.

**Faith-filled Person** (1). Some people always seem to be filled with faith that their Father will take care of them and take care of His people. They are often so filled that it seems to be contagious—lifting the spirits of those whom they meet. The value of this gift, found among both men and women, should never be underestimated.

**Giver (of money)** (1). Many church groups encourage brethren to develop this gift over all others. While it is a gift, and it has allowed much good (and some evil) to be accomplished, it certainly has been overemphasized. A poor person who serves in other ways should not feel inferior because he gives little. A person who has little time to serve because he or she is working long hours to earn a lot of money should not neglect this gift.

**Healer** (2). We desperately need people with this gift. While life expectancy in Western societies is quite long, a greater and greater percentage of the population has one or more illnesses at any given moment. Those with this gift sometimes serve quietly in the Church, providing relief to the brethren. Others serve more visibly, helping to preach the Gospel, showing the Eternal’s great power as a sign to unbelievers.

**Helps**—means “one who helps out”—see “Minister”.

**Hospitable Person** (1). This is mentioned in the context of gifts in 1 Peter 4:9 and appears to be a separate gift. Most congregations have encouraged this gift among their members. Since brethren, today, often live quite far from each other, over-night stays are common. It is usually easy for a traveler to recognize a host who has the gift of hospitality. Beside physically providing for shelter, food and other necessities, some people seem to be much more able to make visitors “feel at home”.

**Knowledgeable Person** (1). This gift is related to teaching, but is not the same. A person with the gift of knowledge will be able to explain complex Bible subjects that might be difficult for others. This kind of person tends to learn

and retain much valuable information. This person may or may not be a good teacher. If he or she is not a teacher, teachers should consult with them so that some of their knowledge may be shared with the congregations.

**Leader**—see “Administrator”

**Love** (2). This is not a specific gift because everyone is required to have it. We mention it for the same reason Peter and Paul did: Great spiritual gifts are meaningless if we do not have love for our brothers (1Cor 13:1-3).

**Merciful Person** (1). These people counsel others who have problems and difficulties. Romans 12:8 encourages cheerfulness among people doing this job. Of course, all counsel given must be according to Scripture.

**Minister or Helps (service to others, physical or spiritual)** (3). This is a large category of serving others. In Eph 4:11 we find that a number of gifts are “for the work of the ministry [service]”. All manner of physical service falls into this category: giving food, water, shelter and clothing to people who need it; visiting the sick and imprisoned (Matt 25:35-36). It also includes spiritual service: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). The physical and spiritual tasks of preaching the Gospel to others are also referred to as “service” or “ministry”. As we stated at the beginning of this article, the Bible in its original languages does not support the concept of an “ordained ministry” or a separation between “physical” and “spiritual” servants. 1 Timothy 3:8-12 gives qualifications for all servants in the Church: “not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless... husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.” Those who meet the qualifications, and have a gift of service should find a way to use it, working in harmony with the others of their congregation.

**Miracle Worker** (2). Most of the miracles in the Scriptures are healings, but some are not. Christ’s first miracle was turning water into wine. He also fed thousands of people from a few loaves and fishes, walked on water, withered a fig tree, retrieved money from a fish’s mouth, and other such wonders. In our modern money-based economy, we often rely too much on money rather than looking for the Eternal to

provide. When some of the prophets lost a borrowed ax head in the water, Elisha asked for a miracle to find it (2Kngs 6:5-6). Philip, after teaching the Ethiopian eunuch, was given miraculous transportation from Gaza to Azotus (Acts 8:26,39-40). He would have had a 34-mile long hot walk without it. When the evil sorcerer, Elymas, tried to subvert Paul, he struck him with blindness for a season (Acts 13:8-11); we may well need protection from our enemies in the near future. Casting out of demons, not specifically mentioned in these lists, would also fit into this category. Christ said His servants would do it (Mark 16:17).

**Pastor or Shepherd**—see Administrator.

**Prophet** (5). Prophets, prophecy and speaking “as the oracles of God” (1Pet 4:11) are all similar—receiving the direct words of God. See the previous sections for details. This is the only gift that appears in all five lists.

**Teacher or Speaker** (3). Most church groups typically do this. (Some groups, both historically and even today, do this a lot—subjecting members to speaking sessions that are multiple hours in length.) Teaching can be an exposition of Scripture or a discourse on some particular subject. Acts 18:18-28 gives the story of how Apollos, of his own accord, began to teach the Truth. Aquila, Priscilla and others had to correct some of his mistakes, but he continued on in his role as a teacher (1Cor 4:6; 16:12). Hebrews 5:12 clearly shows that men who have attended for a long time should be teachers. **There is no scripture that states a teacher must be an elder, overseer, pastor, minister, etc.** Teaching is always treated as a separate gift from administration and other gifts. The synagogues that Jesus and the apostles frequented would allow people to teach based on their ability to teach—they did not reserve this job for only their own elders. Of interest, the word “sermon” (which most people think must be “preached by a minister”) never appears in the Bible.

What should be done if a teacher departs from sound doctrine? Titus 3:9-10 tells us to “avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.” The Greek *Paraitomai* (“reject”) means “refuse”—the same word is used in 1 Timothy 5:11 where women were not allowed to join the special service. As these women who were not accepted were not “put out” of the congregation, so those who speak error are not to be “put out” but re-

jected as speakers after two warnings. While every teacher should strive to avoid teaching any error, congregations are responsible for learning to distinguish truth from error (Deut 13:3; 1Cor 11:19).

**Tongues Speaking and Interpretation** (2).

Numerous Bible references explain that speaking in tongues was a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6; 1Cor 12:10). Much information about this gift is contained in 1 Corinthians 12 & 14. Not all believers speak in tongues (1Cor 12:30). Today, most church groups go to one extreme or the other with this gift. The majority do not seek the gift—they may even automatically “put out” anyone who claims to have the gift. The opposite extreme are groups who seek this gift nearly above all others and may have services where dozens of people are excitedly “speaking in tongues” all at the same time (in opposition to Paul’s instruction). It is important to recognize that the scriptures mention three different types of “speaking in tongues”. In Acts 2:1-11, people spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and others heard them all in their own language. This is a miracle that few claim today, but if it does happen, we would hope that church leaders of any sort would have the wisdom not to try to stop it. Another kind of “speaking in tongues” is done privately, as an encouragement to the believer: “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries” (1Cor 14:1). This spiritual gift should not be much of an issue among believers as long as it is done privately. In regard to “tongue speaking” in services, Paul says: “If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God” (1Cor 14:27-28). There may be some need to allow people to speak in tongues in a service to see if there is someone who can interpret, but the process should be only a small part of the service as Paul shows above. How do we know if someone is just “faking” this gift? We might not be able to tell initially—Christ said there would be “tares among the wheat”. But if a certain tongue-speaker never has an interpreter or if the interpretation is never edifying, then brethren or an overseer should go to him and ask him to stop doing it. Also, if someone has the gift of “Discerning of Spirits,” they will probably be able to tell if the speaking in tongues is from the Holy Spirit or not. No believer should ignore or

vilify this gift. Paul says, “do not forbid to speak with tongues” (1Cor 14:39).

**Wise Person** (1). Wisdom is available from the Eternal to all who ask (James 1:5), though some have a special gift of it. Wisdom is knowing **what to do** to produce the desired results. Some people have wisdom in certain areas of life; others have a general wisdom covering many things. Those involved in administering, Gospel preaching, healing, miracles, serving, teaching, etc. should take counsel of those with wisdom before making major decisions that affect many.

**Words Not in the Spiritual Gift Lists** (0). With five different lists of spiritual gifts, we can conclude that no gift of great importance was left out. We do not find any words in these lists meaning “absolute rulership” or “control” such as: *kurios* (“master” or “lord”), *kurioses* (“one possessing dominion”), *basileus* (“king”), *archon* (“ruler” or “prince”) or *hegemon* (“governor”). Other somewhat authoritative words found elsewhere in the New Testament are not found in these lists either: *rhabbi* (“rabbi” or “master teacher”), *oikodespotes* (“master of the house”), *epistates* (“master” or “superintendent”). There is not one word that means an administrator over many congregations or any other sort of multi-level type of government.

We must reiterate that Christ is the leader of His people. **Christ specifically taught his followers not to use the religious titles that the Jews were using!** He said his followers were not to be called “rabbi” (*rhabbi*), “master” (*kathegetes*) or “father” (*pater*) (Matt 23:8-10). Are we to believe that Christ later instructed his disciples to create a bunch of “church” offices and titles? The ability to serve in the various capacities listed above is a Spiritual Gift to be exercised for the benefit of all. There is no need to speak with some kind of great respect for the human with the gift, because it is the Eternal that grants the gift. Let us all respect and praise Him!

### Elders, Overseers, Pastors

These three functions appear to be very similar. The terms are used synonymously in the Bible (Acts 10:17,28; Tit 1:5-9; 1Pet 1:1-2, see quotes below). They all clearly involve helping, planning and directing other brethren.

We can understand much about the word “elder” as it is used **frequently throughout the Old Testament, the Gospels and Acts**. “Elder” is a general term and refers to older, respected leaders of the community and nation.

An elder might have had a specific leadership position, such as “ruler of the synagogue” or the member of a council, or he may have been simply a well-respected person. Elders were typically over 40 years old, but a very capable man might be considered an elder at 30 (Jesus, John the Baptist).

People were recognized as elders in a variety of ways. In a town where nearly all the people are descendants of a few families, the oldest members of those families were naturally considered elders, without any official recognition. At other times, elders may be appointed by other elders, or elected by the people they serve. The early Church certainly kept this traditional meaning and used it for similar leaders within their own congregations. It is hard to believe that they could have assigned a new meaning to this word as they would have continued to use the old meaning in Scripture reading and in everyday life.

Please read the following scriptures about elders, overseers and pastors. They explain most of what the scriptures say about these people who serve the brethren in congregations.

So when they had **appointed [selected by show of hands] elders** in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23)

And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, **which were determined by the apostles and elders** at Jerusalem (Acts 16:4).

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the **elders** of the church....“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:17,28).

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the **eldership** (1Tim 4:14).

Do not rebuke an **older man** [same Greek word as “elder”], but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers, the **older women** [same word as “elder,” feminine form] as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity (1Tim 5:1-2).

Let the **elders who rule well** be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the **word and doctrine** [“teaching” NIV, YLT]. For the Scripture says, “You shall

not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer *is* worthy of his wages.” Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear (1Tim 5:17-20).

<sup>5</sup>For this reason I [Paul] left you [Titus] in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and **appoint elders** in every city as I commanded you—<sup>6</sup>if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. <sup>7</sup>For a **bishop [overseer] must be blameless**, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, <sup>9</sup>holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, **both to exhort and convict those who contradict**. <sup>10</sup>For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, <sup>11</sup>whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, **for the sake of dishonest gain** (Tit 1:5-11).

Is anyone among you sick? **Let him call for the elders** of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).

<sup>1</sup>The **elders** who are among you I exhort, **I who am a fellow elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: <sup>2</sup>Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, **servicing as overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup>**nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples** to the flock; <sup>4</sup>and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. <sup>5</sup>Likewise **you younger people**, submit yourselves **to your elders**. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” <sup>6</sup>Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (1Pet 5:1-6).

The Greek word for “elder” (also “older men” and “older women”) in the above Scriptures is *presbuteros*. We can see that it has a variety of usage—some places referring to both older men and women (1Tim 5:1-2; 1Pet 5:5), other

places appearing to be a position of leadership in the congregation. Of interest, there are no scriptures that specifically say “eldership is a spiritual gift”, “here is how someone becomes an elder”, or “here is how to remove an elder”. Only if we conclude from the other scriptures that elders often function as overseers and shepherds (pastors) can we fit them into spiritual gift lists. Certainly, nearly all leaders in congregations were drawn from the pool of elders—older, wise people. However, it is possible someone could be considered an elder, but have other gifts such as prophecy, teaching, healings, etc. Such a person might not be involved much as an overseer.

Elders responsible for shepherding the flock of the Eternal and serving as overseers are to be examples, not “lords” over the others. They are to anoint and pray for those in need of help. They are to lay hands on others for special tasks. If leaders do sin, they should be corrected in front of the entire congregation—if they are corrected privately, others will assume that their sin was unpunished or not a sin at all.

Many Bible students debate whether Peter or James was the “head apostle” who made the decisions in the Acts 15 meeting on circumcision. The answer is found in Acts 16:4 where **all the apostles and elders** at Jerusalem were credited with the decision. Acts 15 verses 4 and 22 mention the entire congregation hearing the meeting, and agreeing with the decision, but the apostles and elders seem to be the chief speakers (Acts 15:6). Since we have no obviously recognizable apostles today, it would seem that elders would continue in any **necessary** decision-making role.

It is clear that elders/overseers were appointed by more than one method. Some were appointed by the Apostle Paul, some by Titus—a man Paul chose (Tit 1:5), and some were apparently “selected by show of hands”. Even in the case where the men were selected by Paul and Titus, they probably followed the biblical precedent in Acts 6:3 and asked the people to “seek out from among you... men of good reputation”. The Greek word used for appoint, *kathistemi*, is the same in both Titus 1:5 and Acts 6:3. It means “to set in place” or “to set in order”—it does not mean that Titus picked the person completely on his own. Paul gave Titus **qualifications for an overseer** (v 7)—these qualifications required intimate knowledge of what the men were like. How does one know if a man is “not quick-tempered”, “not given to wine”, “self-controlled”, etc? Titus, not knowing everyone in every city, would certainly have asked the con-

gregation what men were qualified (Acts 6:3).

A very similar list of qualifications is given in 1Tim 3:1-7. Paul said "...if a man desires the position of a bishop [overseer] he desires a good work" (v 1). There is nothing wrong with desiring to serve in this manner if it is indeed for service (not personal exaltation) and if a person is qualified. If leaders are selected by voting, persons desiring to serve must let the others know they are willing to serve. It would be wonderful if there was someone today whom all believers recognized as an apostle (like Paul) or an apostle's assistant (like Titus). But nearly every well known "Christian Leader" today is attached to a specific organization and/or doctrinal statement. Nor do we have recognized leaders that can walk up to a crippled or AIDS-infected man on the street and heal them. (There are some Christian leaders who claim the gifts of healing, but most primarily make people fall over backwards in an auditorium—their "gifts" are highly disputed.) Therefore, today, elders, overseers, and pastors must be chosen either by vote of the people they serve, by appealing directly to the Eternal (see page 62), or chosen by some other Church leader(s) whom a congregation trusts.

Elders need to realize that they are always held to a higher standard of behavior than other members of the congregation. If they are sinning, Paul instructs that they be rebuked "before all" in the congregation (1 Tim 5:20). While the Bible does not talk about removing an elder, one who sins often and is rebuked often in front of everyone will certainly not have much of the brethren's trust.

The Bible does not give us complete detail on what elders/overseers/pastors do. However, we can pick up a number of clues, and we can also borrow from the manner in which elders served in synagogues. Even in the book of James, brethren were still meeting in synagogues (Jms 2:2, YLT). They certainly borrowed some of their worship tradition and practice from them. Synagogues varied in operation, but nearly all of them were rather democratic in nature. Leaders were usually elected. Major decisions were made by "elders"—older men recognized as leaders. The only paid worker in a smaller synagogue was the one who took care of the building and furnishings. Most teachers and worship leaders had other jobs—only a large synagogue would have a full-time paid Rabbi. Members shared numerous responsibilities and volunteer effort was common. For example, if a synagogue needed new tables, rather than take up a collection, one well-off member might simply buy and donate them—

maybe in memory of a deceased relative. Another poorer member might make the tablecloths. If two members both wanted to donate tables, the leadership would have to make a decision.

Early church congregations had many of the same issues to deal with. Major decisions might involve the whole group, but it is not practical or sensible to vote on every little issue—like which tablecloths will be used each week. Congregations do need individuals with some authority. Some duties of those in authority would include designating who will speak in services, determining the time and length of services, taking action if someone is disrupting the service, managing the meeting place, accounting for locally-collected money, arranging for the care of books and other assets, etc. In a small congregation, one person may do all of these things. In a larger group, one or more elders may do each of the jobs. This authority can exist without being dictatorial. Those in authority **must** consider the needs of those they are serving.

Please note that it is possible for **elders** to also be **evangelists** and/or **prophets**. However, the most common teaching of the Scripture is for the Eternal to spread out gifts among the congregation. If the Eternal gives someone many gifts, they should certainly use them. But there is no reason for someone with strong gifts to strive for more. Far too many congregations have suffered too much from the "one-man pastorate syndrome"—the idea that one ordained man will have all the gifts and that everyone else just prays and pays.

### Should Church Leaders be Paid?

Since we just mentioned "paying", should elders, overseers and/or pastors be paid? The phrase "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor" (1Tim 5:17) could possibly be translated "double remuneration", though nearly every major translation says "honor" here. We should start with clear verses. Nobody should charge people who come to hear Gospel preaching. We quoted Titus 1:11, above, which says not to preach for dishonest gain. Also notice:

Freely you have received [the Gospel], freely give (Matt 10:8).

...useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means* of gain. From such withdraw yourself (1Tim 6:5).

And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from



house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you (Luke 10:7-8).

Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him [Christ] from their substance (Luke 8:3).

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God (2Cor 2:17, NIV).

These verses show that the preaching of the Gospel was always free to the individuals receiving it. If the Eternal is behind the preaching, He will inspire others with substance to provide a way for the work to be done. The following verse does show an established congregation should support those leaders who serve it:

If others are partakers of *this* right [to be financially supported] over you, *are* we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ (1Cor 9:12).

However, there is not one New Testament scripture where a leader demands or begs more money from believers. There is no evidence of any Gospel preaching left undone due to a lack of money. It seemed that those who were commissioned to teach and preach just went forth and did it. The Eternal took care of their needs.

In the last part of this section, we ask **exactly how much authority do elders, overseers and/or pastors have, and how do brethren determine whether they will cooperate with a leader or not?** For example, does an overseer have the authority to tell specific members of the congregation that they must come in on a certain day and wash the floor and walls of their meeting hall? Does he have authority to have them wash his private automobile, also? From questions like these we can see why the Bible does not attempt to exactly define the authority of elders—there would be no end of questions that one could ask. Instead, we see the general principles that those with authority are responsible to use it for the good of all involved, and the others should follow that authority unless they believe it is contrary to Scripture. The following passages are helpful:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith (Heb 13:7, NIV).

**Obey** [*peitho*] your leaders and **submit** [*hupeiko*] to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.

Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Heb 13:17, NIV).

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are **over you** [*proistem*] in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves (1Thes 5:12-13).

Note that the Greek *peitho* (“obey”) is usually translated “persuade” or “trust”—it contains the idea of becoming friends, cooperating. This word is not as strong as the Greek *peitharcho*, used for obeying the Eternal or kings (Acts 5:29; Tit 3:1), which was **not** used here. The Greek *hupeiko*, (“submit”) is not a term of absolute submission, but one of peaceful cooperation. Finally, the Greek *Proistemi* (“over you”) is sometimes translated “manage” or “devote oneself” in modern translations. It is used for managing one’s family. (See Rom 12:8; 1 Timothy; 3:4,5,12,17; Tit 3:8,14 for all other uses).

These three verses cited above show the manner of the relationship between brethren and leaders in the congregation. Notice that these verses do not name “elders”, “overseers”, “apostles” or any other specific job, but apply to all who might be in a leadership role. **One is to cooperate with those who:**

**1) Spoke the word of God to you.** Does a leader really expound the Bible, or does he use a few token scriptures and then just preach “nice sounding things”? Religious groups often start out with a preacher full of zeal, but when he dies or moves on, he is often replaced by a bureaucratic type people, who mostly encourage brethren to keep coming and keep contributing.

**2) Have produced observable fruits when you “consider the outcome of their way of life”.** Does a leader have the fruits of the spirit? These fruits are not a “big office and organization”, but “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and], self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). Some leaders are so dedicated to “doing the work” that nobody can stand to be around them. Christ taught that leaders should be known “by their fruits” (Matt 7:15-20). It is even necessary to “try apostles” (Rev 2:2).

**3) Have faith worth imitating.** A leader may preach the power of Christ to live righteously, but then not overcome major sins himself. A leader may tell members they must have faith to give the very money that they plan to live on, but he exhibits no faith that the Eternal will continue his

ministry through tough financial times. Another leader may tell members they must trust the Eternal for healing, but then he quietly uses extensive medical help.

**4) Actually work, admonishing and watching out for the souls of the brethren as if they were going to give account for it someday.** Good leaders will genuinely care for their brethren. You probably do not want to accept a leader who needlessly puts brethren out of the congregation (3Jn 3-10), nor do you want to accept a leader who is so busy that he does not know when brethren are missing from services for months.

These points are an excellent way for a person to determine which leader(s) he or she will work with. The last 2 scriptures indicate that when a member accepts a leader, it should be joyful and without difficulty. He should treat them with respect. Sometimes, when brethren learn that the Eternal does not require them to follow some man to be saved, they become uncooperative, even with leaders whom they acknowledge might be leaders sent from the Eternal. As Hebrews 13:17 says, this attitude is neither joyful for the leader, nor good for the member.

<b>Qualifications of Various Servants in the Church</b>			
<b>Overseers (1Tim 3:1-7)</b>	<b>Elders or Overseers (Titus 1:6-9)</b>	<b>Servants: Ministers &amp; Deacons (1Tim 3:8-13)</b>	<b>Servants' Wives (1Tim 3:11)</b>
blameless husband of one wife temperate sober-minded of good behavior hospitable able to teach not given to wine not violent not greedy for money gentle not quarrelsome not covetous one who rules his own house well having his children in submission with all reverence not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.	blameless the husband of one wife having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination be blameless as a steward of God not self-willed not quick-tempered not given to wine not violent not greedy for money hospitable a lover of what is good sober-minded just holy self-controlled holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.	reverent not double-tongued not given to much wine not greedy for money holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. let these also first be tested let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.	Reverent not slanderers temperate faithful in all things.
		<b>Servants (Acts 6:3)</b> full of the holy spirit full of wisdom	<b>Widows "Taken Into the Number" (1Tim 5:9-11)</b> not under sixty years old has been the wife of one man well reported for good works has brought up children has lodged strangers has washed the saints' feet has relieved the afflicted has diligently followed every good work.

**No New Testament Leader Ever Named A Successor**

When a modern-day religious leader dies, the first question people have is "who is going to succeed him—who will continue to run his organization, pastor his congregation, etc.?" This is a perfectly reasonable question to one who believes that spiritual authority comes

through church organizations and their "ordinations". Sometimes, successors are named by the religious leaders before death; other times, they are named by a group's board of directors or other governing body. After the new leader is accepted, the next question often is, will he teach the same thing as the person he replaced, or will he make changes?

**Usually, the hope of a successor is that he**

will carry on the practices of the original leader or organization. Indeed, even when the death of a specific individual is not at stake, the whole concept behind “ordination” is to authorize individuals to teach the same doctrines and practices as the people doing the “ordaining”.

We do not have space to delve into the history of specific religious groups here, but it is worth examining what typically happens in religious groups over a long period of time. Our scenario could apply to something as big as the Protestant churches splitting off from the Roman Catholic church, to the breakup of a worldwide church organization, to the dividing of a local congregation where you live. The point is to demonstrate the logical difficulties associated with succession of church leaders.

It is actually quite common for religious groups to change in doctrine over time. There are church organizations with doctrines and practices nearly opposite to the ones held when the group was founded. Sometimes these changes are good (toward Bible truth), but more often they are bad (false doctrine and corrupt practices). No matter how bad the changes, it seems that there are always some ministers and members who want to remain with the original organization (let us call it “**Group A**”), and others will leave to form a new church organization (“**Group B**”). We will use the term “minister” for the leader in each group, but the name could easily be changed to “priest”, “pastor”, “board member” or whatever a group uses.

All of the ministers in **Group A** were trained and ordained by other ministers in **Group A**. However, some of them do not like the recent doctrinal changes in **Group A**, so they leave to form **Group B**. Both **Groups A & B** say a lot of bad things about each other in an effort to draw more of the members to themselves, but that only serves to drive members away from both groups. The “bad things” that are said, depending upon the character of the people involved, may be real problems of the group, exaggerations or complete lies. In spite of all the disagreement, **Group B’s** ministry still completely consists of ministers “ordained” by **Group A**—they have not ordained any of their own ministers yet. **Group B** tells its members that all of its ministers are “chosen by the Eternal”, yet they were taught and “ordained” by the exact same process as all of the “apostate” ministers still in **Group A**. The leaders of **Group B** are usually not concerned that some of their ministers joined **Group B** not out of conviction, but because they saw that most of their own con-

gregations were joining **Group B**.

Even stranger, suppose that a minister stays in **Group A** for two years after the split, and then decides to accept **Group B’s** doctrines. He will probably be readily accepted as a minister in **Group B**. Why should a minister take two years longer to figure out the doctrinal problems than the members that he was supposed to be teaching?

What is even more unusual, is that the ratio of members to ministers in a group split often stays about the same in both groups. (For example, if 30% of the members go to group “A”, then about 30% of the ministers will also.) If “ordained ministers” were somehow commissioned by the Eternal and were more full of His Spirit, would not we expect a high percentage of the “ordained ministers” to join **Group B** (the “good” group) and primarily the “unspiritual members” to stay in **Group A**? But in nearly every case, that does not happen. Someone might say, “That statement doesn’t disprove succession of ordination because the Bible says there will be false ministers”. Yes it does. If we regard all of the ministers that stay in **Group A** to be false ministers, that means that the ordination process is no better at finding righteous leaders than simply picking them out of the congregation at random. If a large number of the “ordained ministers” turn out to be false, then “ordination” is of no value. It just means that brethren cannot rely on a man simply because he is ordained—he is still just as likely to go astray as the “un-ordained” man.

With or without ordination, brethren are still left to **look at the fruits of a minister** before deciding to trust him. It would be much better to skip the false practices of naming successors and “ordination” and simply encourage brethren to work with leaders who are apparently gifted from the Eternal and **bearing good fruit**.

The Scripture says that the Eternal grants spiritual gifts as it pleases Him (1Cor 12:18). He never promised to grant spiritual gifts to “successors of leaders” or leader’s organizations. Nor does he tell leaders to name successors. Let us study this subject in the Bible.

There are examples of “named successors” in the Old Testament, but they came about as the result of men’s specific requests. Nearly all the Israelite kings had successors—usually their own sons. However, these cannot be used as a good example because nearly every King was evaluated as “bad” (see books of Kings and Chronicles). The system of genealogical succession was never intended by the Eternal, the Israelite people demanded it (1Sam 8:6-7).

Moses asked the Eternal to appoint a successor to lead Israel, and Joshua was appointed. (Num 27:15-17). Of interest, when Joshua died, the Eternal did not appoint a successor, but left “the elders” in charge (Jdgs 2:7). The final example of a successor in the Bible is Elisha succeeding Elijah (2Kngs 2:9-14). Both Joshua’s and Elisha’s succession were confirmed by the word of the Eternal and great miracles. It was not a matter that their predecessors simply appointed somebody to replace them, it was a matter of the Eternal deciding He wanted someone to continue in the same role.

Matthias was chosen to replace Judas in Acts 1:15-26, but this was before the Holy Spirit came and before Judas ever really functioned as an apostle. Except for this incident, no successor of any apostle or any other leader is mentioned in the New Testament—even when the leaders are telling the brethren that they probably will not see them again.

For I know this, that after my departure savage **wolves will come in among you**, not sparing the flock. Also **from among yourselves men will rise up**, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn every-one night and day with tears. So now, brethren, **I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up** and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:29-32).

Paul clearly told these Ephesian elders that they should be able to withstand the coming attacks themselves. He does not tell them that anyone will “take his place”. Also, in 2 Timothy 4, Paul shows that he expected to die soon. He talks about numerous people and what they should do, but does not name a successor. How could he? Who else was trained by Christ in the same way as Paul? In the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, Christ says nothing about following the apostles or their successors—be does commend the Ephesians for finding the “false apostles” to be liars—It looks like Paul’s teaching (above) was effective!

There are scriptures that tell us that the Eternal gives some people leadership gifts. There are scriptures that tell us the qualifications of leaders. There are scriptures that tell us to look for fruits in leaders. But there are no scriptures telling us to look to people occupying “church offices” or to people who were “ordained” by a previously gifted leader.

## Bible Teaches Christ-Directed Leadership Not Government Form

When people form a new church organization, one of the first things that they do is decide on their government. If the new organization is hierarchical, the debate centers on who will fill all of the various positions in the hierarchy—who will have authority and who will have influence on those in authority. If the new organization is to be congregational, the debate will be over the wording of its constitution and other founding documents: what kind of vote will be required to make each type of decision.

Do you realize that there is no section of the New Testament that deals with the government plan for a local congregation or a church organization? Yet from Acts onward, much of the New Testament is about the forming of congregations. The Romans had corporations and societies that were governed by detailed documents. Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls show that detailed governing documents were written by some of these obscure Jewish sects. Yet the New Testament never once refers to a list of hierarchical leaders or the governing documents of a congregation. It never mentions a list of “ranks” or of someone being “raised in rank”. No believer is ever commanded to follow a human leader “without question”.

But there are many places where people are commended for doing what they know to be good and condemned for that they know to be evil. There are numerous places that mention “eternal judgment”. (You may ask for our free article *What Does the Bible Say About Eternal Judgment?*) **Belief in Jesus as Messiah and Savior is an individual way of life.** It is not just a reason to build “church organizations”.

The New Testament epistles are addressed to the whole of each congregation—they do not address or even name the top leaders in the congregation. The Bible does not have a specific list of “positions” that each local congregation must have to function. We do not find a specific list of “headquarters” positions—we do not even find a term that means “church headquarters”. (The Acts 15 meeting was in Jerusalem, but Jerusalem was never called “the headquarters church”, “the other church”, etc.) We find more than one method in use for putting people into various jobs. With the exception of teachers (Tit 3:10), we do not find any specific formula for putting people out of jobs. It does not say if an overseer keeps his job for a term or for his entire life. (He can be removed for flagrant sin or teaching doctrinal error).

We can be sure that a detailed government plan was not in place by looking at how various problems were solved in the New Testament. The believers most often recognized the task at hand, and appointed someone to do it.

- When widows were neglected, the church did not make a budget request to the “local relief committee”, but found seven men, full of the Holy Spirit, to take care of the problem (Acts 6:1-7).
- When the poor brethren in Jerusalem needed help, brethren helped on their own on three separate occasions (Acts 11:28-30; Rom 15:26; 2Cor 9:1-15).
- Paul asked people to collect things for them one time (1Cor 16:1-3).

We never read about a church administration “middle man”. There is no appeal to “increase your giving to the poor fund” or “give to the foreign mission”. We never read about accounts being “under budget”. All of these collections were taken directly from the givers to Jerusalem.

We know that the brethren regularly assembled together, but we never read one word about the planning or construction of a building for services. Rather we read that brethren met in homes (Rom 16:5; 1Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1:2) and in one place, a school (Acts 19:9).

What about preaching the Gospel? Christ had given a very general plan making Peter the main apostle to the Israelites, and Paul was the main apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7). But did the apostles design a detailed evangelism plan? Was the Jerusalem meeting in Acts 15 where the church was organized? Look what happened right after this meeting:

<sup>6</sup>Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were **forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to preach the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup>After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but **the Spirit did not permit them**. <sup>8</sup>So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. <sup>9</sup>And **a vision** appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” <sup>10</sup>Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, **concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them** (Acts 16:6-10).

This brief passage contains four separate examples of on-the-spot direct revelation guiding the church. There are many other examples (Acts 8:26,29,39-40; 10:1-20; 13:2-4; 18:9-11; 20:22-23; 23:11; 27:23-24; 1Tim 4:1). **One cannot**

**read all of the above scriptures and believe that first century evangelism was carried out by a humanly devised master plan.**

The Bible has much to say about what Christ does and how we should have His attitude. Christ told His followers that He was treating them as friends, not servants (John 15:14-17). All converted people are forbidden to “lord it over” others, but are to be servants (Matt 20:25). Our Savior treated so many people so kindly that He was known as “a friend of publicans and sinners” (Matt 11:19). (Would people say that about you or the leader of your group?) The Eternal referred to Abraham and Moses as “friends” (Ex 33:11; 2Chr 20:7; Isa 41:8). Notice our Savior’s example for us:

<sup>2</sup>fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, **being of one accord**, of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you **look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others**. <sup>5</sup>Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup>but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:2-8).

Everyone must be **careful to avoid causing a new or weak person to stumble**. “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt 18:6). 1 Corinthians 8 explains how a strong person with proper knowledge may eat meat offered to an idol because the idol is really nothing. Paul concludes the matter in verses 11 to 13: “And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

When giving another person instructions, there is not one case where a converted leader used a “do it because I said so” approach. Either the purpose is obvious in light of Scripture or there is an explanation given. Also, there are no instructions to Church leaders about how to “maintain their authority”. For example, some modern-day “min-

isters” insist on being called “father”, “pastor” or “mister” (even by people much older than they) to command respect. Matthew 23:10 (KJV) shows leaders should not insist on being called “master”, which is essentially the same word as “mister”. A leader who is genuinely serving will have the respect and cooperation of other converted people—he will not need to “maintain his authority”.

While leaders should be humble, there are times for them to speak strongly—when someone is trying to deceive the brethren. “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. **Therefore rebuke them sharply**, that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit 1:10-13). Again, please notice, that these trouble-making men were not “cast out of the congregation”, but corrected so they could be “sound in the faith”.

### Regaining the Power of the New Testament Church

When they are honest, the leaders of most church organizations will admit that their group is far away from the New Testament church—which was full of great miracles, powerful messages and people who gave their lives for what they believed. They will admit that the members of their group have numerous sicknesses, family problems, and other difficulties. Some groups will make excuses and say that those early miracles have been replaced by the modern “miracles” of the Internet, television, printing and transportation. Indeed, church organizations and ministries everywhere tell their members that they could really “get the Gospel preached” if they just had more money.

But church organizations have literally **spent billions of dollars on mass evangelism**, and the job is far from finished. If you can find the leader of a church organization in a thoughtful mood, ask him this: “Which would be more helpful to him to reach the world with the Gospel, another million dollars or the ability to completely heal paraplegics—or persons with AIDS?” If the leader is thinking, he will recognize the latter. A million dollars buys only so much building space, TV broadcast time or religious literature—which people may pay attention to, or may simply ignore. Those who witness miraculous healings

never forget them—and great miracles could easily capture the attention of the world **without costing a cent!**

Since our Father in Heaven is serious about preaching the Gospel to the world, why does not He grant His people such miracle-working power? We can best answer this question with a couple of questions. Suppose such miracle working power were granted to people in the church groups that you are familiar with. Would these groups tell those who witnessed these miracles to repent and begin living by the Bible? **Or would they tell them to join their church group because “God is working there”?** Indeed, thousands, maybe millions of Christians would try to join the church group that had a person who was repeatedly used to perform miracles that are obvious to everyone.

**The need is for the miracle-worker to tell these people:** “I have no organization to join. You need to repent and live by the teaching of the Bible with the guidance of the Holy Spirit in you. You can fellowship with other believers wherever you can get together. You can help teach others in whatever way Christ leads. But consider yourself a member of the One Church, a spiritual body of believers—never a member of some human church organization!”

After nearly two thousand years of church organizations, a massive effort will be required to undo what so many people have come to accept. But if Jesus Christ is most concerned about people who want to be members of His flock and look directly to Him, it is not likely that He will pour out His powerful spiritual gifts to those who will use them for the glory of a particular church organization.

### The Bottom Line: Authority from Heaven or Authority from Men

It is good to study the Bible and understand its teaching on government. But, even with much study and prayer, imperfect humans may still have different opinions about some details. Jesus Christ asked the simplest and most basic question regarding any authority:

<sup>23</sup>Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?” <sup>24</sup>But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: <sup>25</sup>“The baptism of John—where was it from?

**From heaven or from men?**" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' <sup>26</sup>But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." <sup>27</sup>So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things (Matt 21:23-27).

The question is, "**Does one's authority come from heaven or from men?**" Whenever we think about any church leaders or groups, it is good to think about where the authority comes from. It is not always easy to tell. The Jewish leaders were afraid to openly say where John's and Jesus' authority came from, and Jesus did not tell them. We face the same problem today: religious leaders may not know where a person's authority comes from and the Eternal does not always tell us either.

"And now I [Jewish sage Gamaliel] say to you [the Sanhedrin], keep away from these men [the Apostles] and let them alone; for if this plan or **this work is of men**, it will come to nothing; **but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God**" (Acts 5:38-39).

Nevertheless, it is worth studying the Bible to learn about how people receive authority. Those with authority from the Eternal come in all different manners. Some, like the Apostles, do great miracles, teach the truth and are easy to recognize (2Cor 12:12). Others, like John the Baptist, may not do miracles, live an unconventional life style and preach a stern message (Matt 3:1-12; John 10:41). Daniel had the Eternal's authority, but he worked for a Babylonian king. Ezekiel was a captive; Amos was a shepherd. Established governments and churches often reject men chosen by the Eternal, but they also accept them sometimes. An extensive study could be made of servants whom the Eternal has chosen. While they do sometimes sin (2Sam 12) or even get so discouraged and doubt (1Kngs 19:4; Matt 11:2-6), people with the Eternal's authority tend to have these general characteristics:

- They are more concerned with doing what the Eternal wants than with what people think. They are not concerned about popularity.
- Their mission does not fail due to persecution—though they are sometimes killed when it is over.
- Their mission does not fail due to lack of

money or popularity—even though the chosen person may get discouraged and want to give up.

- They often have some direct revelation, vision or dream from the Eternal—but not always. The Eternal apparently never told John the Baptist he was "Elijah" (John 1:21), but Christ said that he was (Matt 17:12).

The situation can become more confusing when people with the Eternal's authority also receive men's authority. David was anointed king over Israel by the Eternal (2Sam 1:16; 12:7), but also by the people and the elders (2Sam 2:4; 5:3). We should never assume that because someone has the authority from men that he cannot also have authority from the Eternal. We should also never forget that the authority of man can be fickle. The crowds wanted to make Jesus King one day (Luke 19:38), but then wanted to crucify him only a few days later (Luke 23:18-23).

The **authority of man** comes in many different appearances as well. It is not always bad. The Eternal commanded men to form civil governments and choose elders in congregations. Believers need to pray and use their spiritual discernment to choose righteous leaders to the extent possible. They also need to watch and stop obeying those chosen leaders when they give commands contrary to the Scriptures. The authority of men can be recognized in these manners:

- Men are voted into leadership positions. They may also go through a ceremony asking the Eternal to empower each leader, but one should not conclude that He always "rubber stamps" the leaders that people choose. On the other hand, it is possible that the Eternal would choose a man through His Spirit influencing the vote of the brethren.
- Men receive authority from other men. They may be appointed, "ordained", or receive an office inheritance. If a leader who had the Eternal's authority dies, there is no guarantee that someone appointed in his place will have the same authority.
- Men simply act under their own authority—even though they may think they have authority of the Eternal. When a large group of people recognize a man as a spiritual leader, it is easy to think "the Eternal chose him." Even the leader may consider his followers to be proof that he

has the Eternal's authority.

- Men who are paid by other men to preach and teach usually are operating under the authority of men. But those who are willing to oppose their employers to stand up for truth when it means losing their only occupation may well be acting on the authority of the Eternal.

Another common claim men make is “**my authority is from the Bible**”. While these men have probably read the Bible, it is still not clear whether **their understanding of it is from man or the Eternal**. A leader may think the Bible validates what he is doing, but it may condemn it. If the Eternal gives someone understanding of the scriptures, then they have authority from Him. But if their Bible understanding comes mostly from their own ideas or those of other men, then they have the authority of men.

You [Jewish leaders] search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

"I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, [you] who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? **Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust** (John 5:43-45).

Over many years, this writer has observed that a great many believers—even those who live largely righteous lives—have a tendency to find scriptures that are **compatible with** their prophetic or doctrinal ideas, then teach those ideas claiming the Bible authority. But their specific ideas are not completely contained in the Scriptures, nor are they divinely given by a dream, vision, angel or the Holy Spirit. These people frequently become blind to some of the verses that may clearly contradict their ideas. As the above verses say, they will be judged by the Scriptures that they think justify them.

As a final point in the Eternal's vs. man's authority issue, we must realize that those who are given authority by the Eternal do not always obey the Eternal and vice versa. All possible combinations exist. Of those who have His authority, some obey and some do not. Of those chosen by men, some obey and some do not.

	Chosen by the Eternal	Chosen by Men
Obeyed the Eternal	Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Daniel, the Apostles (except Judas)	Stephanas (1Cor 16:15), Seven men chosen in Acts 6:1-7, Apollos (Acts 18:24-26), The man chosen in 2Corinthians 8:19
Did not obey the Eternal	Saul (1Sam 13:13), Solomon (1Ki 11:4), Jehu (2Kngs 10:31-32), Demas (2Tim 4:10)	Azariah (2Kngs 14:21) and other "bad kings", the false apostles (2Cor 11 & 12; Rev 2:2), the "teachers of the law and Pharisees" (Matt 23).

### What Should a Believer Do Today?

The many preceding pages effectively show that the typical authority structures used by many church groups are not from the Bible. But that does not mean that the Eternal is not using anyone in those groups. He frequently works through imperfection. He did not want Israel to have a king (1Sam 8:6-9), but he agreed to work with them through their kings if they would obey (1Sam 12:12-17). The Eternal even spoke through the corrupt High Priest who wanted to kill Jesus (John 11:49-53). He worked with seven churches that still had serious problems (Rev 2-3).

**The believer who will work only with a perfect Church group generally ends up working with no church group.** Yet we are commanded to assemble with other believers (Heb 10:25). We are commanded to serve Christ and use the spiritual gifts that he has given us—for our brethren and for everyone (Gal 6:10). While we should do everything we can to follow the Bible teaching on leadership, and to encourage others to do the same, this is not necessarily the most important issue of the Bible.

Christ said that his disciples would be known by their love (John 13:35), not by their method of leadership. It is not a sin to love and to work with believers who have some non-biblical aspects to their leadership.

**A congregation with Biblical leadership, but little love and little fruit is worse off than a group with poor structure but much good fruit.**

On the other hand, after reading this paper, you should be able to see that it is possible to serve the Eternal without “church buildings”, “ordained ministers”, “church pastors”, non-profit corporations, boards of directors, and



things like this. We all must realize that we are responsible to our Father for what we do. We must know that the Bible authorizes us to depart from evil and corrupt leaders, but still commands us to bear fruit even if we cannot find biblical leaders.

**The key is the power of Christ through His word and His Spirit.**

The Bible shows us that we are expected to rely on the Eternal, and that we will have trials and tests when it comes to dealing with other believers:

*It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man (Pslm 118:8).*

The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe (Prov 29:25).

For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you (1Cor 11:18).

You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for **the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God** with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut 13:3).

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will **secretly bring in destructive heresies**, even denying the Lord who bought them... (2Pet 2:1)

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested **those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars** (Rev 2:2).

Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you (Rev 3:9).

From the last three Scriptures, we **can know** that some men will conspire, lie and secretly bring false doctrines into the Church. Furthermore, we cannot simply assume that a man who was a righteous leader at one time will continue to be so in the future (Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-27 ; 1Pet

2:20-22). Even the apostle Paul admitted that he could go astray if he did not keep himself in subjection (1Cor 9:27).

If the Eternal did command us to follow church leaders without question, then either the leadership must be infallible, or we are commanded to follow what we know to be error! The Eternal does not ask us to obey any man without thinking; that would be idolatry. Unquestioned obedience is only for Him (Deut13:4 ; Acts 5:29). There are more verses to help us determine who are false teachers (1Jn 4:1-3; Jude 10-12,16-18; 2 Pet 2:1-4,19-22; 2Jn 7-11).

**1) Begin a regular program of personal Bible study, if you do not already have it.** The best method is to read through the Bible in an organized plan: either straight through, New Testament first or some other manner. Using a Bible study course or a “study Bible” (the NIV Study Bible, Scofield Bible, the Companion Bible) may clear up some difficult scriptures, but will also give you a certain amount of men’s ideas about the Bible. Christ still speaks to people through His written word.

**2) Seek wise counsel.** Talk to other wise people whom you know—whether you think they will be in favor or against the ideas that you are thinking about (Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 15:22).

**3) Prepare to accept things that are different than you have known before.** Do not accept doctrines just because they are different, but, but realize that when you totally submit to the Eternal, that he often begins to show people things that they did not understand before.

**4) Ask Christ what you should do.** Prayer takes on a new meaning when you understand you are directly responsible to Christ, rather than just a member “under” a leader of your church. There are life-impacting decisions to make. You may realize that it would be best to move your home and family in order to serve with other brethren. Or, you may take on new responsibilities right where you are. If you are seeking Christ’s will, He will show you. He is not afraid to answer in a miraculous way, if you will use this miracle as guidance, and not as a matter of spiritual pride. Gideon’s request for a sign is a good example (Judges 6:36-40). He asked for the dew on the ground and on a fleece to be opposite from each other. This miracle would completely dry up as the sun rose—it was not something he could show off or prove to his friends. But when the Eternal miraculously gives you His decision, be prepared to obey it.

Do not be afraid to start your own service if Christ leads you in that direction. You do not need a building, any paperwork, or people with titles of any kind. You can sing praises, study the Bible, share experiences and encourage each other with a group of people in a home. That is closer to the services described in the Bible than most of the services run by Church organizations. The purpose of services is to learn and to build a community of believers to which the Eternal can grant spiritual gifts and use for his work. Do not start a service because you would feel “spiritual or important”, but because you plan to do a lot of work. Our article, *Starting a Local Congregation* can help.

This paper is not a call to “**do-nothingness**”. **It is a call to be ready for a big job in a very real way.** Today, the fields are white for harvest (John 4:25). **There are millions of people who are “turned off” to organized religion.** They have seen corruption or error in organized churches and they will not go back. There are millions more who attend churches, but are not satisfied with their relationship there. Other millions have never heard an accurate presentation of the message of the Bible. There is so much work to do in so many different places!

All believers are called to a way of life. We should all be bearing fruit—“letting our light shine”. We should all be helping, serving and teaching others—as they are ready to hear. We should all bear fruit through the Holy Spirit **now:**

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, **will find him so doing.** Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, “My master is delaying his coming,” and **begins to beat his fellow servants** [attack other church leaders or brethren?] and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour

that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 24:45-51).

I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5).

Most assuredly, I say to you, **he who believes** in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.** If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever (John 14:12-16).

**These promises are given to individuals, not to churches or denominations.**

All of us need to overcome the past and “press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call” (Phil 3:14). We realize that we are responsible for far more than finding a church organization where we can “pay, pray, obey and stay.” We are all going to be judged by what we say and do (Matt 12:36; 2Cor 5:10). We all can read the Bible. Christ will ask us why we did or did not follow Him, not about which church leader we followed. We need to ask for spiritual gifts (1Cor 12:31); we need to use them (1Thes 5:19). “While day lasts, we must be busy with the work of him who sent me; night comes, when no one can do any work” (John 9:4, Moffatt). May the Eternal strengthen all of us as we seek to obey Him!

“You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from **your own steadfastness**, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2Pet 3:17-18).

*At this point, our exposition of government from the Scriptures is finished. We would be interested in prayers, comments, and corrections from our readers. See contact information on the back page. We have, and hope to continue to revise this article based on what we learn from others. The final sections deal with answering questions about specific teachings or scriptures used to support the governments of various church organizations.*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: ANSWERS TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

### If Everyone is Free to Disagree, Can Anything Be Accomplished?

As there is no place in the Church for self-seeking high-handed authority, so there is no place for self-seeking, uncooperative brethren. It is the duty of believers to follow their leadership as much as possible within the commands of the Bible (1Cor 11:1; 1Thes 1:6).

We then who are strong ought to bear the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself... (Rom 15:1-3).

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others (Phil 2:3-4).

The Jerusalem meeting recorded in Acts 15 is a good illustration of the right working relationship. The leaders in Antioch realized they had a difficulty—some people thought circumcision was necessary for salvation, others did not. So they decided to go to Jerusalem. The brethren were invited to attend the meeting as long as they were orderly (Acts 15:22). Hopefully, they were not continually complaining about the place, time, or hard stone chairs! Those who felt moved to express their opinion could do so (v 7). When the apostles, elders and brethren came to a decision, everyone was expected to accept it.

People who resist the work of the Holy Spirit in others are tearing down the Eternal's work, rather than building it up. **A person who disagrees with a church leader should have a sound scriptural basis.** Saying, "I would do it differently," is not enough. We all are responsible for the work that we do, good or bad.

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. **If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss;** but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1Cor 3:11-15).

The man in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12-27) who does not try to do any work at all loses his eternal life.

Disagreements will occur between brethren, but they can be resolved. Issues should be discussed, but people should not be attacked. 2 Peter 2:10-11 and Jude 8-9 inform us that even angels do not bring reviling accusations against Satan for his evil deeds. When Paul had a disagreement with Peter, he went directly to him (Gal 2:11).

Romans 14 shows that it is not necessary to "solve" all doctrinal differences. The main example here is about whether or not to eat meat, however the observance of days is also mentioned and the principles can certainly be extended to many issues. The teaching is clear: "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things" (Rom 14:1). When people believe a doctrine, they should practice it—not try to get everyone else to practice it. It is wrong to try to force someone to practice a doctrine they are not convinced is Biblical. "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23). Also, note verses 12 and 13: "So then each of us shall give account of himself to the Eternal. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore...."

Sometimes, serious problems of one believer affect other believers. Examples might be flagrant personal sins, teaching of heretical doctrines, or continual unwanted attempts to solicit brethren as business customers. Christ provided **a specific procedure** for resolving these situations:

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, **tell it to the church [ekklesia]. But if he refuses even to hear the church [ekklesia], let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.** Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in

My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matt 18:15-20).

This procedure is very effective, but it is almost never used as specified. As Paul went to Peter (Gal 2:11), the person who perceives the offense should try to work it out directly with the person(s) involved. Resolutions in this manner create fewer problems for everyone. If that fails, then get one or two witnesses—people who have seen or know about the problem at hand. Never simply look for friends who you think will see things your way. The effort here is to find truth, not to prove yourself right. Elders are not required at this point. Any mature believer with the Holy Spirit should do this (Gal 6:1). If that fails, take it to the entire congregation. (Some will claim that this scripture means “go to the ministry” or “elders”—however Matthew wrote *ekklesia*, specifying “congregation” or “assembly”).

Taking a problem to the entire congregation produces many positive effects: (1) Silly or groundless complaints will disappear because people will be embarrassed to take them in front of the whole congregation. (2) A man will have a chance to be heard by a large, hopefully unbiased group—greatly reducing the chances of being “put out” unjustly. (3) The congregation receives a chance to use the Bible and learn to judge justly. (4) If a person has a righteous cause, but the leadership is wrongfully trying to “put him out”, the entire congregation will know the true reason and have the opportunity to leave the corrupt congregation and continue to work with the righteous man.

When the Scripture specified “the church”, it implies those who assemble; you do not need every last person to make a decision. Even in very small congregations where only two or three are gathered together [besides the accused and accusers], a binding decision can be made. The principle of “two or three” does not mean that a man can hand-pick two or three friends and expect to be heard by them. When an issue is taken before the congregation, everyone who wants to hear it should be permitted to hear it.

### Will Congregations Fragment Without Strong Leadership?

Before we answer the above question, it is important to realize that sometimes congregations needlessly fragment **because** of strong leadership. When real, sincere problems or doctrinal disputes arise in a church group, strong leaders sometimes solve them by “putting out” everyone in the group that disagrees with the

leader’s teaching. This often results in many people—even whole congregations—being forcibly separated from the main church group. This writer knows of a case where this happened when some members and ministers in a big organization were trying to have one doctrine changed. The organization “put out” many. A few years later, the big organization accepted the doctrinal change. Did they welcome back all of those who had been “put out” a few years earlier? No, they would be living proof that the organization had made a big mistake. Usually, the better individuals can explain their belief from the Bible, the more quickly they will be “put out” (church leaders who maintain the air that “the Eternal is working through me” do not like to be proven wrong).

However, in organizations where members study little on their own and rarely challenge the leadership on doctrinal issues, strong human leadership does tend to keep the group together. But what does Christ want? Does he want unity with a few strong men and many people who do whatever they say? If a group is **not** being led by Christ and **not** growing in His grace and knowledge, does it matter if they stay together in a man-made unity? Would it not be better for the group to break up, and for all of the people in it to realize that they need something different than what they had?

The purpose of a group of believers is for encouragement and training each member to be a priest to the Eternal. **We must consider that the Eternal may want groups to break up and re-form so that His purpose is accomplished.** (The Eternal often works in rather catastrophic ways—He allowed a massive persecution to come upon the Jerusalem congregation which caused brethren to be scattered everywhere preaching the Gospel (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19).

However, the Scriptures also teach that brethren should strive to be unified and work together (John 17:22, 1Cor 1:10). Not every division is from the Eternal. Satan causes them too. Brethren should make every effort to live at peace with and help other believers (Rom 14:19). There are three major kinds of problems that cause divisions in congregations and three solutions from Scriptures:

(1) Some members of a congregation want to leave it for a wrong reason—either they are pursuing a false doctrine, or are falsely accusing a person of blatant sin. Mature members of the group can try to help those in error understand, but they would be better to let them depart, than

try to hold a group together that will be in a continual “fight”.

(2) A person is causing great difficulty among your group, either by personal sin, antagonizing others, or false teaching. If this person will not change after applying Matthew 18:15-17, they will have to be asked to leave the congregation.

(3) Most members of a group (or the leaders of a group) are pursuing a false doctrine or a sin. Those who see the error can try to show them, but they will probably have to leave the group.

If some of the above responses appear to be a little “resigned” to letting the problems happen, we need to look and see how the Eternal works in general. He does not force most people or nations to “be good”, He often lets them learn by experience. The history of the world is largely the history of nations not being forced to “be good” and creating evil for others. More specifically, when Moses and Aaron were faced with a massive rebellion, they fell on their faces to the Eternal in sadness (Num 14:1-7). Later in the same chapter, when the Israelites fought and tried to conquer the land against the words from Moses, Moses didn’t try to stop them — he let them learn their own lesson by losing the battle. Moses knew his authority was from the Eternal; he did not have to assert himself over the people to prove it. There are several cases in the New Testament where the members are found departing from the truth (2Cor11:4; Gal 1:6; 3:1 ; Eph 4:14; Jude 3; 2Jn 7; Rev 2:1-7), yet the writers did not always name the “troublemakers” and tell others to avoid them.

Notice the results of a meeting on the question of circumcision: “Since we have heard that some who **went out from us** have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’—to whom we gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24). What follows is not an attack on those who left, but an explanation of the issues and what the people should do. We find similar instruction repeated in 1 John 2:19: “They **went out from us**, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that **none of them were of us**.” Again, these verses are followed by an explanation of the false doctrine being taught. There is a trust in these scriptures that mature brethren will be able to recognize and avoid false teaching.

It should be obvious from all of the different Christian sects and their doctrinal statements that the Eternal does not try to stamp out every

group that only teaches some truth of the Bible and some error. Christ specifically taught his followers **not to stop** other groups from teaching in His name:

Now John answered Him, saying, “Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.” But Jesus said, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (Mark 9:38-41).

Similarly Paul refused to stop people from “preaching Christ” even for a wrong motivation

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice (Phil 1:15-18).

But sometimes, those with serious disagreements will not leave of their own. We have already seen from Matthew 18:15-17 that people who refuse to abide by a decision made by the entire congregation should be treated “like a heathen and a tax collector”. They should no longer be permitted to attend services. We find that all places in Scripture where people are “put out” of the congregation, it is done in a public setting. It was not to be done quietly at the decision of a few individuals and quietly covered up. If a problem is serious enough that someone must be put out of the congregation, then everyone should know about it and be able to understand it. (When congregations allow a member to be dismissed upon the decision of one or a few leaders, the potential for abuse is high—members may sometimes be dismissed secretly for unbiblical reasons.)

When a man was practicing sexual immorality, Paul instructed the congregation to put him out. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **when you are gathered together**, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, **deliver such a one to Satan** for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1Cor 5:4-5).

Paul did not write a private letter to “put out” the man or instruct only the leaders to do it; it was addressed to the entire congregation. We see this confirmed in Paul’s later instructions to re-admit the man in 2 Corinthians 2:6 “This punishment which *was inflicted by the majority* is sufficient for such a man.” The purpose of this punishment is not to “get back at” someone who hurt the leaders or the congregation, but “that his spirit may be saved”—to teach a lesson that he might ultimately be saved.

Paul used a similar expression for putting out a man in 1 Timothy 1:16: “Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I **delivered to Satan** that they may learn not to blaspheme.” We can learn from verse 3 of this chapter that Paul had just left Ephesus and wrote this letter to Timothy who was still there. Paul certainly would have followed the principle of Matthew 18:15-17 and brought the heresy of these two before the congregation. These men were certainly still trying to draw others after themselves and Timothy had to continue to “wage the good warfare” against them (1Tim 1:18).

John also found it necessary to be physically present to put someone out of the congregation: “I wrote to the church, but Diotrefes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, **if I come, I will call to mind his deeds** which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church” (3Jn 9-10). Diotrefes, who was recognized as a “church leader,” certainly needed to be removed from the true Church. One of his sins was putting out the true brethren—probably on his own authority. Yet it seems he was clever enough that the local people could not show from the Scripture how he was wrong. John promised to take action “if I come”. He would have been able to show Diotrefes’ false teaching to be false from the Scriptures and the people would have put him out. The practice of writing a letter to “put out” a member is not found in the New Testament.

### Comparison of Three Types of Church Governments

Entire books have been written about the good and bad points of various forms of Church government. The following table contrasts a typical political hierarchical church government, with a typical political congregational church government. The third method starts from the primary assumption that members will be looking to Christ to direct his work through spiritual gifts—organizational considerations are secondary. Obviously, there is no system that can guarantee that members will always look to Christ—this government will only succeed as the members yield them-

When a majority of a congregation accepts a false teacher or an unacceptable doctrine, the only thing converted people can do is withdraw from the wayward organization:

If anyone teaches otherwise **and does not consent to wholesome words**, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such **withdraw yourself** (1Tim 6:3-5).

The phrase “does not consent to wholesome words” is very important. It shows that these people will not listen to the truth—there is no longer hope of correcting their error. We find similar instructions to the Thessalonians. The entire second chapter of 2 Thessalonians is about a great “falling away” and the “man of sin”. In chapter 3 verse 6 it says, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **withdraw** from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.” **When evil forces take over, departure is the only real solution.** Certainly physical assets and friends will be left behind, but these things we must be prepared to forsake for His kingdom (Matt 19:29).

Again, the idea of withdrawing is repeated in Romans 16:17, “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and **avoid them.**” The KJV reads “mark them” instead of “note those”. The Greek *Skopeo* means to “look at” or “take notice of”. It does not indicate some kind of public declaration of disagreement as some church organizations may teach. **The avoidance approach is repeated again** when the apostle John was condemning those who claimed that Christ had not really come in the flesh. “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, **do not receive him into your house nor greet him;** for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2Jn 10-11).

selves. If members begin to look to their own interests rather than their Father’s, the lack of rules may cause it to fail faster than the other two methods.

The column at the left contains some situations that may arise in a church group. The next three columns contain typical things that might happen in these various forms of government

Problems That Occur Within Churches:	The Effect of Problems in 3 types of Church Governments		
	Centrally Controlled (Hierarchy)	Congregational (Elected Pastor & Leaders)	Christ & Spiritual Gift Centered Government
Leaders begin to teach new doctrinal <u>truth</u> .	In hierarchies, only top leaders introduce new truth. Members accustomed to obeying will readily accept it, especially if easily provable from Scripture—even if it greatly affects their lives.	Members “set in their ways” may reject new truth without a hearing, especially if it affects their lives. The truth’s teachers may be voted out, or the group may split. If the truth is well presented, it may be accepted	Brethren will see the new truth as they study it in their Bibles and as the Eternal reveals it to them. If selfishly motivated people reject the new truth and leave the group, it is good—Christ can work with them separately.
Leaders begin to teach new doctrinal <u>error</u> (though it will certainly be called “truth”).	Most members, accustomed to obeying, will readily accept the error. Those that find the error to be unscriptural can either quietly reject the teaching or be put out of their group for openly showing it is an error.	The error may be rejected because it is “different” or because study shows it to be wrong. However, if the error is popular and well presented, it may be accepted. Group splits are always possible.	Those studying and close to Christ will see the error. If it is a complex error too hard for some to study, they can rely on members that they believe to be gifted in this area. If the group splits, they can still be friends.
One or more leaders are known to be sinful or corrupt and they refuse to repent.	Removing the top leader is nearly impossible because all who even speak of it will be “put out”. Removing other leaders is also difficult because they can “put out” people under them, and because top leaders rarely accept a member’s testimony against them.	A leader that is clearly bad to everyone can easily be removed. However, if he is popular in some way, if he is a major contributor to the organization, or if people are reluctant to change, they may not get rid of the bad leader.	Every member has the responsibility to go to the one causing offense, then to take others, then to go to the assembly (Matt 18:15-17). The assembly should agree to put him out. If not, the assembly may divide. Those seeking good will leave the bad.
How are spiritually-gifted persons used in the congregation?	The top leader, his relatives & friends have vast opportunities to use their spiritual gifts. Lower leaders may use gifts if they are in clear support of the hierarchy. Members must usually enter into the hierarchy to meaningfully use most gifts.	There is a fairly good chance that gifted people will be recognized and used in this environment. Sometimes, local politics and jealousy may prevent it. If so, the person is free to find another similar group that desires his ability.	The entire fellowship is based on the concept of recognizing gifts in others and sharing them with each other. No one can try to “monopolize” a gift because each member is free to use their own gifts and make use of the gifts of others.
When people are paid to serve the congregation, what prevents too much or too little pay?	There is no good way to prevent top leaders from paying themselves too much (either in salary of benefits), or to prevent them from controlling lower leaders though their pay.	There is a tendency to pay leaders the salary of the poorest person on the board, yet look down on the leader if they try to do additional work on the side or also serve another group.	People should be first recognized for their gifts, then accept pay only as their gift is needed so much that they cannot work. Like Paul, they should always be ready to do regular work if necessary.
<u>Unity</u> : How do they explain the existence of other church groups in light of Bible statements about only “one Body”?	Hierarchies teach Christ works through their top leader, through their ministry and then the people. They must teach that other groups are either partly disconnected from His Body, or not part of it at all.	Congregationalists generally have no trouble acknowledging that Christ works through many or all groups. They attend their present group because they believe it best represents what Christ would want for them.	Believers recognize all other believers whether they are members of organizations or not. They will not be gathered together until Christ does it (Matt 24:31; Mar 13:27; John 11:52; Eph 1:10; 2Thes 2:1).
Who should own the buildings and other assets used by the congregation?	All property and assets are usually owned by a central headquarters. When one leader dies, there is little assurance that the assets will continue to be used for their originally-intended purpose.	Assets are usually controlled by a board, so one person cannot divert them to some other purpose. However, there is a tendency for people who are interested in controlling money to try to obtain positions on boards. If the majority votes to misuse assets, it happens.	The owning and providing of assets for the use of the congregation is considered like another gift. Those who provide the assets still own them and are responsible for continuing to see that they are used properly, even if the group breaks up.

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How can the congregation reach out with unified evangelism? (local service projects, open meetings, TV, publications, foreign missions, etc.)	If the head of the organization is determined to do it, and is (or can find someone who is) gifted in this area, then it will be done. This is often the main unifying factor in such organizations. However, in older, declining groups, ministerial pay and benefits may take priority over this issue.	These groups often debate this issue: Should money be spent on buildings, activities, the locally needy, or on evangelism? Often, local needs win out. Outreach evangelism usually requires someone in the group to champion the cause. When it works, it is often focused and effective.	The New Testament is the ultimate example of how evangelism should work. People who had this gift used it, whether they were helped or harassed, paid or impoverished, applauded or imprisoned. Many of the brethren saw their works and sought to help them.
How are individuals taught who are new to the congregation?	Hierarchies often do not encourage or allow "lay members" to teach new people. They either have a tightly regulated study course for them, or sometimes rely on frequent ministerial visits. Hierarchies generally work hard to make sure that new people become members if possible.	In general, members feel free to help teach a new person, and if the new person asks questions, they will be answered. If the new person does not seek out the members, and if the members are not interested and have no organized plan to help, the new person may feel rather alone.	Everyone needs to be able to explain their relationship with Jesus (1 Pet 3:15). Everyone should be able to read the Bible and study with others. Those with gifts for teaching should seek out those that want to be taught. Those with gifts of hospitality should encourage them.
Are leaders effective in preaching corrective messages or in correcting members with known sins?	Hierarchies are usually fast and effective in correcting members who are reflecting badly upon the organization. The only times they are slow is when the sinner is a very big contributor or related to a top leader.	Much depends upon the people. There may be a tendency for too much gossip and too little correction. It may be difficult for a leader to preach a corrective sermon if he knows that he might be voted out for doing so.	Correction is part of love in helping others to reach the fullness of Christ. There are no positions to defend or assets to control, so people are much more likely to correct one another as necessary.
How effective is a group in helping members with problems that they are trying to hide or do not understand themselves?	Groups held together primarily by hierarchy often have little closeness. Personal problems often go unnoticed and people may fear to come forward with them. Nevertheless, there are usually some "good shepherds" in hierarchies. Matters are usually kept very confidential.	Locally-oriented congregations are usually much more aware of individual problems—they are free to talk about them. Whether or not they are effective in helping often depends upon whether someone has been assigned the job, or whether a member volunteers to help.	The New Testament uses "brother", "sister", and other family terms for those in Christ's Body. All members know that they are assigned the job of helping those struggling with sin—as long as they do not sin in the process of helping (Gal 6:1-2).

### If Church Organizations Are Unbiblical, How Do They Have Good Works?

The largest complaint against earlier versions of this paper was, "How can all of these traditionally-run church organizations be wrong, yet accomplish so much?" The letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 tell us that the Churches of the Eternal can be a mixture of good and bad. They have some doctrines right and some good practices, and they have some sin and error. He tells each believer not to leave the group, but to continue the good, and repent of the bad.

We must first realize that the Eternal is capable of accomplishing His righteous purpose with imperfect individuals. The Pharisees taught and maintained the Scriptures even though they did not always live by them. The kings of ancient Israel did many good works (especially David) even

though the Eternal did not originally want Israel to have kings (1Sam 8:6-7). King Solomon stands out as an example of someone who did both much good and much evil. He built the temple of the Eternal, wrote some of the Bible, yet he turned away from the Eternal in his latter days (1Kngs 11:9-11).

But what about the New Testament? Does the Eternal sometimes work through people who do not have all of the truth? Notice again:

Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side" (Mark 9:38-40).

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:



The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice (Phil 1:15-18).

Christ and Paul both taught believers not to try to stop others who were claiming to do the Father's work. Christ did say that some of them who claimed to be doing His work really were not (Matt 12:30; Matt 7:21-23). He told us to be careful of which leaders we follow and with whom we fellowship, **but He did not tell us to try to stop others who were doing work in His name.** Why? Probably because Christ is quite capable of stopping works that He really does not want, and that even very imperfect works can sometimes accomplish good. As Paul said, he rejoiced that Christ was preached—even out of contention. The Holy Spirit is a powerful teacher. A person sincerely seeking to obey Christ can eventually learn the truth even though his teacher may have taught much error and/or had the wrong motives.

Many groups today that perform “ordinations” and build a central church organization do it because that is what they think Christ wants them to do—or because they think everyone needs to be taught the same “truth”. They are not doing it out of rebellion. Others may read the Bible and realize that hierarchy is wrong, but do not know what should be done, so they stop thinking about it. Yet other groups may know their methods are unbiblical, but fear losing members and money if they change, so they do not. Once organizations have been established for a long time, they usually continue to do what they have always done—no matter what the Bible says.

Even more importantly, we must realize that **individuals come to Christ and receive the Holy Spirit, not organizations.** This writer has a friend whose life was saved during World War II by Catholic hospital workers while he was fleeing from the Nazis. He was not Catholic and had nothing to offer them—they could have been killed if their good deed was discovered. Yet a recent historical discovery has shown that some individuals within the Roman Catholic Church helped well-known Nazi war criminals escape with large amounts of money and valuables. **There are some serving Christ and some serving Satan within the same organization.** If you have been in a “church group” for a long time, the same thing is probably clear to

you on a personal level, though it may be less dramatic. You probably know some who are diligent to follow the Eternal in their personal lives, and others whom you wonder why they even come to your church.

We do not need to be judges of organizations or the individuals in them—we are not responsible for their eternal judgment. We may, as this paper does, show where the teaching of others is in error. But it is a mistake to say “they cannot be brethren since they do not see this doctrine as I do.” On the other hand, we should not accept any given doctrine from a group simply because we have “been a member of that group” or because they have a large building or a large, impressive organization. If a teacher does not write the biblical or historical reasons for each doctrine that he teaches, we have no way to know if a teaching was based on a thorough study of the Scripture, a revelation of some kind, or a quick answer given with little thought. Ultimately, every person is responsible to his Father for what he or she believes and does.

### Do Church Leaders Have Authority Like Moses?

Some people will say that the Eternal has always done His work through “one man”, and will hold Moses up as an example for church leadership today. While the Old Testament examples are for our learning today (1Cor 10:11), New Testament instructions and examples never specifically compare a church leader to Moses or tell us to imitate his example. Christ is compared to Moses (Acts 7:37). Nevertheless, we will consider the Moses example and show that the Eternal did not instruct Him to establish a hierarchical government.

When Moses was overworked by judging the people, his father in law, a priest of Midian, suggested he set up a system of rulers of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. (Ex 18:13-26). The first thing we must realize is that these captains were only judges—not part of a governmental apparatus legislating laws, collecting tithes (or taxes), assigning jobs, telling people how to run their personal lives, etc. They judged between people **who brought disputes to them.** If we read the parallel account of this Deuteronomy 1, we see that Moses asked the Israelites to choose the people they wanted as judges—those who were already leaders among the people and not respecters of persons (Deut 1:13-17). Moses was also involved in the choosing—though it is unlikely that he could have personally chose the tens of thousands of men who

became “captains of tens” (Ex 18:25). If this were a classic hierarchy, Moses would have appointed the top leaders, and they would have appointed the next level, etc. However, Deuteronomy says the people chose these judges.

Furthermore, many people overlook the fact that the Eternal says nothing good or bad about this system of 10s, 50s, 100s and 1000s. Captains of hundreds and thousands are found later on in the Bible, but they are always related to the military, not to civilian judges as Moses appointed. Israel is later commanded to appoint judges and officers on a geographical basis: “You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment” (Deut 16:18). **Who were the people commanded to appoint judges and officers? The same people who were commanded to give offerings in Deut 16:16**—all the men in Israel! Finally, the Eternal gave Moses a plan for the “top leadership” of the nation. He asked Moses to find 70 men already accepted as leaders by the people. (Num 11:16-17, quoted page 9). He placed His spirit in these men so they could govern in righteousness.

If there is something we can learn from this for today, it is that the Eternal involved the people as well as gave His specific will through a leader recognized as his representative. People need to learn to think, and be responsible to follow those people whom they have chosen, as well as obey those leaders whom the Eternal has obviously chosen.

A few chapters later, in Numbers 16, we find the story of Korah’s rebellion. Those believing in hierarchical government often use this scripture in an effort to show that anyone who defies the Eternal’s chosen leaders deserves death. But we need to ask the question: “Why were Korah and his followers killed by the Eternal?” Did they sincerely believe that Moses departed from the Eternal and was no longer led by Him? Did they believe Moses was disqualified because of some ongoing sin? Did they plead with Moses and try to get him to change what they thought was wrong? **No!** They never brought up any truthful complaint against Moses! Korah’s group was rebelling simply because they saw the power that Moses had and they wanted a little of it (Num 16:3). Ultimately, they were rebelling against what the Eternal is doing. Rebellions for personal gain are never justified against any leaders that the Eternal sets up.

## Do Church Leaders Have Authority Like Old Testament Kings Over Israel?

Another popular method of supporting hierarchical church government, is to compare church leaders to the Kings of Israel—showing how much authority they had. This writer believes the comparison is valid, but only when we realize that the Eternal wanted to be the King of Israel, rather than have human kings. “Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations’” (1Sam 8:4-5). Samuel was a prophet, not a king. He often communicated with the Eternal, and people could come to him for teaching or for judging—resolution of disputes. Samuel did not have a fancy headquarters, a band, an army, a harem, or any of the others things that kings typically have. No one walked around proclaiming: “great is Samuel of the Israelites”. The Israelites should have praised an invisible God as their Leader.

Some believers say essentially the same thing today: “We do not want to be part of little congregations meeting in homes doing only a local work. If a worldwide work has to be done, one man has to be in charge of it. We want to be a part of a big organization that other people can see. We want nice buildings that others will admire. We want a trained ministry with professional degrees. We want to support a suave, dynamic evangelist whom everyone will admire. We want to rally around a human leader that will do the work!”

In order to have the unity and status, people are often willing to give great power to the head of their group. In ancient Israel, the Eternal never gave any leader (prophet or king) the power to execute anyone who disobeyed him. Yet, even before Israel had a king, **the people gave this life or death authority to their leaders!** “Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death” (Josh 1:18). **In church organizations, people often give great authority to the leader—authority never given by the Eternal.**

So what did the Eternal say when the people asked for a king? “And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them’” (1Sam 8:7). Many “church organizations”

have claimed in their sermons and printed literature that “a work” would be disorganized and ineffective unless it is totally under the control of one man. **Do these statements deny the power of Christ, the True Leader?** Can He manage thousands of “local ministries” and hundreds of “regional ministries”? He needs to! Does He require a man to be in charge of that for Him? No!

Originally, ancient Israel was not told to have a standing army. “Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight” (Lev 26:8). The people would do the work, but their success would be beyond what is humanly possible. Paul often compared the preaching of the Gospel to war. The New Testament evangelists similarly relied on the Eternal for power to preach the Gospel. They did not obtain a squadron of horses, chariots, and/or ships so they could maximize the missionary outreach. They did not hire bands or entertainers to gain attention. They did not build hospitals or child-care centers to attract potential converts. There is not even one single record of plans to build a “church building”. The New Testament Church relied on miracles or the simple power of Christ to attract people to hear their message. But most church groups seem to want to concentrate money in one place first, and then ask the Eternal to use them to preach the Gospel. So what did He say when the people asked for a king?

“Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.”... “He will take your sons and appoint them for his own [list of purposes]... He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your menservants and your maidservants and your finest young men and your donkeys and put them to his work. And will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. **And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day.**” Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, “No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (1Sam 8:9-20).

The scenario has been repeated hundreds of times in church groups throughout history. People seek out religious organizations—they feel com-

fortable there because they are a part a group “with whom God is working”. The leader of the organization may or may not be successful in “doing a work,” but he will certainly collect money from the people, put them to work on service projects, and judge the people their own way. Sometimes, members begin to see injustice and waste in the organization and wonder if it is right. They may begin to study their Bibles and find disagreements with their organization’s doctrine. People who talk about or attempt to resolve sins and problems within the organization may be “put out” of the organization. They often lose nearly all of their friends and often their livelihood. Before the 1800s quite a few of those who rebelled against established religion lost their lives. Many other people remain in their church organization (seeing that some good is still being done) and they cry out to their Father to save it—but He often does not hear. Did Samuel give the answer in the scripture above?

We should not be surprised if some church organizations turn out to be mostly bad—most of the kings of Israel were mostly bad. As Israel had some good kings that led the people in righteousness, so some church organizations have had leaders that led the people in righteousness. Also, both Israel and church organizations have had leaders that were partly good and partly bad. Even with this variety of good and bad kings, the Eternal told Israel that he would continue to work with them under the “king” system, and things would still go well if they obeyed Him: (1Sam 12).

...you said to me, “No, but a king shall reign over us,” when the LORD your God was your king. Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired. And take note, the LORD has set a king over you. If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your God. However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers (1Sam 12:12-15).

Similarly, Christ still works with people that are in church organizations, and sometimes much good is accomplished—it all depends on how well the leaders and the people follow their heavenly Master. But if we want a full relationship with Christ, should we not seek to be governed

by Him directly? A strong human leader can always enforce a certain kind of “unity”. Problems and the people associated with them can always be “put out” of a church organization. But there is no guarantee that he will lead in the truth. If individuals let the Eternal be their king, they will have real unity and He will always lead in the truth. This freedom has its price: if people willingly stray from the truth, no man will be there to force them back. But with this freedom, everyone can be all that Christ wants him/her to be.

Let us now consider the Example of **King David, fleeing from King Saul**. David knew that he was prophesied to be the next king, yet he did not kill Saul, even though he had two opportunities (1Sam16:1,13; 24:6; 26:9). Some might conclude, by analogy, that this means we must obey a church leader no matter how “bad” he appears to be. But if we read the Scripture in detail, we find that David’s actions were very similar to the New Testament instruction for dealing with bad teachers: he did not try to eliminate Saul, but neither did he cooperate with him.

David knew that the Eternal still reserved the right to choose the king, so he did not depose him himself (Deut 17:15). David often inquired of the Eternal (1Sam 23:2,4; 30:8, etc.) and knew that He would tell him when it was time for him to be King (2Sam 2:1). He knew that the Eternal planned to take care of Saul himself (1Sam 26:10). However, did David and other righteous people obey Saul instead of the Eternal? No! We see that David (1Sam26:21; 28:1-2 ), Jonathan (1Sam 19:1-2), Michal (1Sam 19:11-13), the Priests (1Sam 22:13) and Saul’s own servants (1Sam 22:17) **all did what they understood to be right** rather than follow Saul!

Only two generations later, the nation of Israel faced a similar, yet different decision. The Eternal intentionally divided the kingdom into Israel and Judah (2Chr 11:2-4). However, when Jeroboam, the man the Eternal put in the office of King, introduced false doctrine and refused to let the priests do their rightful work, the Eternal allowed faithful men to leave Jeroboam’s corrupt government and join the more righteous government in Judah (2Chr 11:13-17; 15:9). When two national governments were available, the Eternal let the people move to be under the best one. If the Eternal is working through several church groups today, will not He similarly honor the desires of His people to serve in the best one?

### **Other Misunderstood Scriptures**

**Romans 10:14:** “How then shall they call on

Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” This scripture is misused to claim that people cannot meet together for a service unless they have a preacher (often wrongly extended to mean “ordained minister”). **The context here is evangelism**, teaching the truth to new people, not the meeting of converted people. When mature brethren were facing false teachers, the apostle John told them: “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1Jn 2:27).

**Acts 8:30-31:** “So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘**How can I, unless someone guides me?**’ And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.” This scripture has been used to “prove” that men need other men to guide them in their study of the Bible. Before conversion (and in the absence of some divine revelation), nearly everyone needed teaching. The man whom Philip was teaching did not have the Holy Spirit to guide him, nor did the Eternal choose to reveal Himself directly as He did with Cornelius in Acts 10. Most people learned the Gospel through the preaching of men (Rom 10:13-16) The Ethiopian eunuch had a good knowledge of the law, and with the new understanding about Christ, he was ready for baptism. He was probably “on his own” spiritually after he returned to Ethiopia—there were few other converts there. Philip did not tell him to quit his job so he could move nearer to a local congregation!

**Acts 15:1-35:** Some church organizations teach that this was the first “ministerial conference” or “convention”—an example of how the ministry and leaders of the church group should get together at their headquarters to make doctrinal and procedural decisions for the whole group. The Bible gives a completely different picture. The meeting was initiated by those in Antioch—the only ones who came to Jerusalem were Paul, Barnabas and others from Antioch (Acts 14:26; 15:2). There is no mention of anyone from the other areas either being invited or attending the meeting. The only mentioned topics of the meeting were the great work being

done among Gentiles, and instructions to them. The statement produced at the end of the meeting was addressed only to Antioch and the nearby regions of Syria and Cilicia where the dispute about circumcision surfaced. Nothing is said about informing the other Gentile congregations that Paul taught: Perga, Iconium, Lystra or Derbe. Nor is there a mention of anyone from Samaria, Galilee, or any other nearby place. It was only a one-time meeting between brethren of Antioch and Judea because it was brethren from Judea (Acts 15:1) who were causing trouble for Gentile believers in Antioch.

**1 Corinthians 1:10:** “Now I **plead** with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you all speak the same thing**, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Some religious leaders use this Scripture as “proof” that all brethren must follow one human leader. They read the words “same thing” and envision a doctrinal statement, or “inspired decisions” by their group’s leader. But the Greek text implies no single uniform statement or source of information. The words “same thing” in this verse are translated from the Greek *autos* which is a **pronoun** (it substitutes for another noun) meaning “the same”. Usually, one must look elsewhere in the sentence or paragraph to find the antecedent (the word the pronoun substitutes for). However, *autos* is sometimes used just to give the idea of sameness, without a specific antecedent. If there is an antecedent in this verse, it is probably Jesus Christ—we should all be in agreement with Him.

By reading the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 1, it is certain that Paul is **not** telling them to follow one human leader so they can speak from a unified doctrinal statement. The chapter specifically tells the brethren not to align themselves with one human leader. Furthermore, there are **no punishments or condemnations given for someone who might disagree**. Later in Paul’s letter, he teaches that some division may be necessary for the Eternal’s purpose: “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. **For there must also be factions among you**, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1Cor 11:18-19). Paul clearly wanted them to agree with each other in their teaching through consideration for each other and love of the truth. He did not assign some local person to be “over all teaching” to enforce unity.

(Paul never does this in any of his letters.)

Paul taught them to follow Christ rather than a man. Certainly, there will be areas of disagreement. Christ did not teach Paul about every possible problem that would come up (1Cor 7:25). He taught them that there were some issues where brethren might disagree and that they should respect each other’s opinions (1Cor 14). Unity comes by agreeing on those basic truths taught by Christ, and then by refusing to divide ourselves by following those who claim that their understanding is better than another teacher’s understanding.

**Titus 1:5-6:** When Paul told Titus to appoint elders in every city, does this prove that there are three levels of hierarchy in the New Testament Church? (Was Paul “over” Titus and Titus over the elders and the elders over the people?) The Greek word for appoint here is *kathistemi*, the same word that was used to “appoint” the seven men who served the widows in Acts 6:3. The men in Acts 6 were originally selected by the people, then “appointed” by the apostles. It is almost certain that a similar method was followed by Titus. The next few verses give the qualifications for those whom Titus should appoint. Most of the qualifications relate to personal life-style, something known only by the people in each of the cities Titus visited.

Furthermore, there is no scriptural support at all for the idea that one person must be “over” another in authority if he lays hands upon him or appoints him. Paul and Barnabas had hands laid upon them by Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen (Acts 13:1-3). They were not “over Paul” in authority. Furthermore, it does not make sense that all of these men would “report to” Titus in the future as he did not continue to live there. Paul told him to leave the Island of Crete and come to him in Nicopolis. (Tit 3:12). A couple of years later, Titus was in Dalmatia, even further from the Island of Crete (2Tim 4:10). Mail and travel were much slower then. Titus could not be some kind of “archbishop of Crete” if he left the Island and spent most of his time in other places. Paul told Titus to “set in order the things that are lacking” so they could run their congregations themselves as both Titus and Paul would not be there.

**Titus 1:9:** When Paul told Titus to find overseers who “hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught”, did he mean that truth is always dispensed from the “top down” and local teachers must teach only what their leaders teach them? If

this were so, it would be in conflict with the Scriptures on page 49. The apostles were taught directly by Christ and were not confused. Before the New Testament books were available, the only sources for truth were Old Testament, the apostles, and the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit is an excellent source of truth, false apostles found they could teach lies if they claimed the source was the Holy Spirit—they deceived many. This is why any revelation from the Holy Spirit must be compared with Scripture.

Today, each person has his or her own copy of the Scriptures. We no longer have living apostles to follow. There is no reason why a teacher should “teach what he has been taught” from a “high ranking” leader when they **both claim the Scriptures as their authority** and it can be easily shown that the leader is in error. The entire effort of the New Testament writers was to keep truth in the Church, the body of believers—not establish a perpetual group in charge of doctrines. This does not mean that any member of the congregation should teach whatever he wants. It is a great sin to be a false teacher. Those who depart from the teachings of long-time leaders must thoroughly know the Scriptural basis for their actions.

**John 21:15-17 & Acts 20:28:** These Scriptures contain instructions to Peter to “feed and tend my sheep”, and a group of elders to “shepherd the church of God”. Some will claim that these verses set the leadership in authority over the people as a shepherd is in authority over his animals. They forget that our Savior is the chief Shepherd (1Pet 5:4) and that believers are all His sheep (1Cor 3:23). We can easily demonstrate the relationship from a brief parable:

A prince hired a shepherd to tend and feed his sheep. He started the shepherd with 100 sheep, and told him he would be sending him 100 more each week for the next four weeks. The shepherd asked if he had complete authority over the sheep, and the prince said, “Yes, I am entrusting them to you.”

At the end of four weeks, the shepherd gave this report: “Things are going well; the sheep are learning to obey. I have been feeding most of them, except the independent ones that try to eat where I cannot see them easily. Them I put in a pen where they will not influence the others. They are getting thin and some of them have died—that is teaching the others that disobeying does not pay. We had a wolf come in once, but fortunately I woke up before he killed very many.

Some sheep were so scared and stupid they got in a big pile and suffocated! A few of the old rams were fighting off the wolf, but I threw them out of the pasture for that—they should not be doing my job. I have not had time to mend the fence so we have had many run-a-ways. I catch the run-a-ways that I can find easily and punish them, but will not waste time on the ones that stray far—we do not want sheep like that here! Another thing that is working well: I have had a lot of nice lamb dinners and been able to stay warm with the skins when it is cold. I think we have nearly 200 sheep out there so just keep sending them every week and this flock will keep growing! Any chance of me getting a raise?”

The above story is about a bad shepherd. The Eternal sends him sheep (members), and he pretends to be a shepherd, but he hurts more than he helps, and the flock is destroyed and scattered. Our Savior gave the analogy of a shepherd tending sheep to His Church so they would understand the principle of taking care of others even when “the sheep” are hurting the shepherd or themselves. Shepherds have limited authority from the owner to help the sheep, not to use them for personal gain. “The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

### **Without Hierarchy or Divine Guidance, How Can Decisions Be Made?**

Sometimes brethren may have major decisions to make in a congregation, but may not be able to determine the will of the Eternal in the matter. One example of such a decision is whether a congregation should build, lease, or rent a place to meet. Another might be participation in one of several possible evangelism projects. Yet another example is which of two similarly gifted people should fulfill a certain function within the congregation. In traditional church congregations, the leader or group in charge simply makes the decision, and it is done—good or bad. But in a group looking for direct leadership from Christ, the brethren may sometimes discuss, pray and fast together, but still not be able to reach a conclusion. They may not be comfortable with simply voting if their group is largely divided on the issue, or if a significant portion of the brethren simply do not feel that they have a firm understanding of what the Eternal would want them to do. Is there any biblical way that the group can make such decisions and confidently go forward together?

Consider this example: “And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said,

‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.’ And **they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias.** And he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:23-26). They had defined some qualifications for an apostle, but did not know which man to choose. They asked the Eternal to choose for them by casting lots. Can we “cast lots” today? How can we do it?

History and archeology show that the method used for casting lots was the writing of each person’s name on a small stone or wood fragment, putting all the “lots” in a narrow necked jar, shaking it up, and letting one fall out. The question we must ask: was this something that was done only this one time, or was it an established principle that continued to be used in the New Testament? That is not clear, as the New Testament neither definitely confirms or denies the practice. When the evil Simon the Sorcerer attempted to buy his way into a position in the Church, Peter told him “Thou has neither part nor **lot** in this matter” (Acts 8:21, KJV). The Greek *kleros* is used here, the same word used in Acts 1:26 and in Matthew 27:35 where they cast lots for the Christ’s clothing. It is possible that Peter was telling Simon that he would not even be considered in any future casting of lots for church leaders, or this may be just an expression meaning he would have no part in the church at all.

The Eternal instructed Joshua to use lots to determine who was responsible for the sin that had caused Israel to be defeated in battle (Josh 7:10-20). The Eternal could have told Joshua exactly who did it, but instead He told him to cast lots the next day. The expression “was taken” found in verses 16 through 18 refers to taking a lot from a jar. They first put in the names of all the tribes, then the sub-tribes, then the families, until they found it was Achan.

The casting of lots was included in some of the temple services (Lev 16:8), and to divide the Israelite’s inheritance (Num 26:52-56). Joshua chapters 14 through 23 are a very detailed explanation of how it was done. This method prevented favoritism on the part of the leaders in dividing land—they could not give favorable land (with streams and trees) to their friends and the rocky hillsides to people that they did not like as much. As Proverbs 18:18 says, **“Casting lots causes contentions to cease, and keeps the mighty apart.”** Furthermore, the Eternal has not ceased to

work through this method. The land of Israel will be divided again in the Millennium—by the casting of lots! (Ezk 45:1; 47:21-22; 48:29.)

As the physical inheritance was selected by lot, the principle of the spiritual inheritance being chosen “by lot” (the Eternal’s decision) is in the New Testament. “Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance [lots, Greek *kleros*] of the saints in the light” (Col 1:12). The same usage is found in Acts 26:18 and 1 Peter 5:3. The Eternal even uses the expression “cast the lot” to describe some of His own decisions (Isa 34:16). This last expression is probably figurative, and some of the others may be as well. Nevertheless, “casting lots” was obviously a familiar concept to New Testament writers.

There is no specific New Testament command **to stop, nor to continue** the practice of casting lots. The principle stated in Proverbs 18, above, and other Scriptures below show that men cast lots without any specific command from the Eternal to do it. When the men on Jonah’s ship did not know who was responsible for the massive storm that was about to kill them, they prayed and cast lots. The Eternal answered them (Jonah 1:6-7). Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, was selected by lot to burn incense when the angel appeared to him—there was no Old Testament command to do this, but certainly the Eternal was behind that selection (Luke 1:5-11).

“The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prv 16:33). **If brethren are agreed that they want the Eternal’s will in a matter, but cannot agree on a specific decision, casting lots can be used to make the decision.** The example quoted above contains all the essential elements to properly cast lots:

(1) **Do what you know to do first.** The apostles remembered what Christ said about the qualifications of an apostle—that he should have been with Christ from the beginning. They found two men who met those qualifications. They would have been negligent in their duties if they would have simply made a lot for everybody who “might be interested”. Casting lots should not be a short-cut to Bible study. If two people read the Bible and are convicted of different opinions, they should not try to “settle it” by casting lots. Experience has shown us that the Eternal does not reveal all doctrinal truth to all of those who serve him—we can find no group of believers who have had the same doctrines for 2000 years. He wants us to continue to study his word both for correction and continual learning. If he has not

given us a clear understanding of a doctrine, maybe He wants us to continue to study, pray, and meditate about it until He does.

**(2) Make sure those involved are willing to accept whatever lot is cast.** If someone says, “Yes, I’m willing to cast lots for our choir director, but if Jones is chosen, I’m quitting the choir”, that person either does not have faith that the Eternal will choose, or does not want to obey Him. Casting lots, in this case will not “cause contentions to cease”.

**(3) Pray for the Eternal’s guidance.** If this part is left out, decisions may simply be left to chance. In their prayer, the disciples acknowledged that it is the Eternal who knows the hearts of men. Without going into an extensive study of prayer, we realize that the Eternal may or may not hear our prayers based on how we live our lives (Isa 1:18; Acts 10:31; 1Pet 3:7). If men are pursuing evil or their own selfish interests, the Eternal may not answer the prayer for a decision by lot, just as He may not answer other prayers. This should not make this method any less desirable. If our goal is to live a righteous life and we get distracted doing the “wrong thing”, the “wrong thing” is more likely to fail if based on random decisions (what happens if the Eternal does not influence our casting of lots). The sooner we fail at a “wrong thing” the sooner we will recognize our mistake and get back on the track.

**(4) Do not dispute the decision.** There may be debate about which names are “placed in the hat”, but once lots have been finalized, the prayer has been said and a lot is cast, it should not be disputed. To dispute such a decision is an admission that either one does not believe that the Eternal was in the process to begin with or to say we know better than the Eternal.

There is no biblical indication of specific material or method needed to “cast lots”. Writing names on equal sized pieces of paper or cardboard

or pulling one out of a hat without looking seem equally valid. As long as people seek the Eternal’s will, and the method is random (there is no easy way for anyone to cheat.)

**The biggest problem with casting lots to make a decision is that many people do not believe that the Eternal can really answer in this way.** Unless you ask for some kind of miracle in addition to asking the Eternal for the right lot, you cannot prove to anyone that the Eternal made the choice for you. To rephrase point 2, if you cannot accept any lot that might be cast, do not cast lots!

### **Apology to People Hurt in the Past**

This writer once worked for church organizations that wielded much control over its members. While the organization taught a lot of truth and did a lot of good, most of the membership became utterly reliant on the organization—not on Christ. At times, the members were abused—commanded to do things by their leaders that they would never do themselves (Matt 23:4). This writer was not directly in the “ministerial hierarchy”; he did work at the organization headquarters and did help that hierarchy to be more effective in its deeds (both good and evil). This writer would like to publicly acknowledge that he had a part in unbiblical government, apologize to anyone hurt by such government, and let these people know that he has prayed for their healing in this matter.

It is important to realize that the mistakes made by church organizations do not nullify the truth that they teach, the good works that they do or the fruit that they bear. On the other hand, the good works do not nullify the error that was taught or remove the hurt from those who suffered wrongfully. May the Eternal grant all who are willing the strength to trust Him and to do His will.



**Scripture Index**

This index gives the page number(s) of every scripture reference in this paper. It can be very helpful for comparing papers on government. When another paper uses a specific scripture to prove a point, you may look it up in this paper to see how it is explained here. This index also can be used to help determine which books and chapters of the Bible are useful for studying church organization and government. All the reader needs to do is find the books or chapters below with many references, look over them to find your area of interest, and begin your Bible study.

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