

*"...live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).*

## Light from the Word

### Church Governance



*Writings based on God's Word*

*"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom. 13:1-2). "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Pet. 2:17).*

Every one of us is under various levels of authority and all are called upon to respect and/or exercise various types of authority: in the home, the nation, the work place and the church, with all being ultimately under the authority of Almighty God. This article discusses church governance from the perspective of its biblical role and responsibilities, as well as our individual obligations as members of the church, the Body of Christ.

Paul explains: *"And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets: and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12).*

We are given some examples of the structure and function of church authority in the New Testament. This includes the labors of the Apostles Paul and Peter in shepherding various churches, Paul's instructions to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and Titus (Tit. 1:5) to ordain elders and deacons (including their qualifications), ordination of deacons by the twelve Apostles (Acts 7:1-7), and the assembly of apostles and elders at Jerusalem to address church issues (Acts 15:1-29). The Apostle Peter, himself an elder and inspired of God, gives very sound and helpful counsel to all who are called to serve in this office (1 Pet. 5:1-9). We believe that our forefathers were diligent in applying biblical examples and teachings when the roles and functions of our church leadership were established. Many aspects of our church authority structure are outlined in the section on Apostolic Christian Church Governance in our Statement of Faith.

We have examples of the calling to leadership of Moses (Ex. 3:11-22; 4:1-17), David (1 Sam. 16:1-13), Isaiah (Is. 6:1-9), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1-10) and others. They were

called from various backgrounds and due to their limitations there was often a humble reluctance to serve. Yet God assured them He would provide. Serving in the office of elder is a very humbling experience (Acts 20:19). It requires a willing heart (1 Cor. 9:17), much prayer, and grace and wisdom from above. Our brothers and sisters have been faithful over the years in fulfilling the simple request of the Apostle Paul: *"Brethren pray for us" (1 Thes. 5:25).*

God will grant a shepherd's heart to those He calls to this role, as so beautifully described by Jeremiah: *"And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord" (Jer. 23:4).*

Elders are accountable to Almighty God, to the Elder Body, and to the congregations they serve (1 Cor. 4:2). They work together for the biblical unity, spiritual welfare, and peace of the Brotherhood. Each elder before he is approved, makes a promise before the Elder Body to support their conclusions as reached by candid and respectful deliberation and counsel, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and based on the whole counsel of God's Word (Phil. 1:27; Acts 15). There is no hierarchy in the Elder Body and brothers are asked to serve on rotating committees for the sake of order (1 Cor. 14:40) and to carry out various spiritual and administrative duties.

What are the responsibilities for all of us as members of the Body of Christ? As already mentioned, prayer is the first priority. We are taught to respect our leaders highly for their labors on our behalf and for the Lord's church. *"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, specially they that labor in the Word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17).* Our responsibility according to the Word goes even deeper: *"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:7).* This scriptural teaching may go against our nature. It certainly stands out against the strong cultural trends to set aside and criticize authority. But obeying God's Word brings peace and joy—exactly the kind of

environment He seeks for His beloved Body, the church, as it works together in love and mutual respect and points the lost to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We find examples in the Old Testament of both blessing and condemnation, depending upon how God-given authority was viewed. Jethro gave fatherly, constructive advice to Moses—and all were blessed (Ex. 18:13-27). Korah rose up in rebellion against Moses and he and his followers were destroyed (Num. 16:1-35). David was sought by Saul, but he was mindful of God's warning: *"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (1 Chron. 16:22).* Absalom rebelled against King David and lost his life (2 Sam. 15-18). Undermining and resisting authority is defined as the sin of sedition and is named among the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20).

When an elder does not follow a consistent pattern of godly, compassionate service and does not adhere to the Word which requires that he receive counsel, there is a mechanism in place and scriptural directives to address this appropriately (1 Tim. 5:19-20). We are thankful that these measures have not had to be taken very often as we have been blessed with many faithful men of God who devote a significant portion of their lives on our behalf and are motivated to serve by the love of Jesus Christ who gave His all for us (2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 5:25).

As elders it is uncomfortable for us to write or speak about the topic of church governance. Yet, we take seriously the warning that no Scripture is ever to be set aside or diminished (Rev. 22:18-19). Rather, *"...all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).*

A "thoroughly furnished" church will apply all of these teachings with loving diligence. Good open communication will be encouraged. Spiritual leaders will be easy to be entreated and impartial (Jam. 3:17). It will be understood that they must be vigilant, providing oversight with a Christ-like, sacrificial love, giving sound warnings and admonitions with clarity (John 10:11; 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:8). God will richly bless His flocks when they follow His teachings in humility and love.

An editorial committee of elders prepares articles for this section of Silver Lining to address some special needs of our times.

Suggestions for subjects are welcome and can be sent to:

Silver Lining Editorials, 1523 County Road 400N, Congerville, IL 61729 or fellowshippromoter@gmail.com