

The Role of Elders in the Church of God

Roger Kendall—February 3, 2018

This morning my message is going to be focusing on and reviewing from the Scriptures the true nature of God's government in the Church, and how that integrates into the role and responsibilities of elders.

Thinking in terms of just looking at the role of elders, deacons and the whole structure within the ministry, I came to see that I needed to also explain and discuss how God functions, as far as the government of God in the Church.

When we think of government, we think of power, rulership, authority and control. We also think of laws, statutes and judgments to regulate people's activities and their conduct. We can compare it to human governments, but there's a vast difference between God's government and what we see in the world.

With that in mind, I believe that there's still much confusion about the government of God in the Church, especially the role of elders. I thought it would be important to give clarification to this and perhaps open it up to discussion. I think it's a topic that needs to be evaluated and understood so that we, as God's people, can really continue to function together in unity, working together for the common goal of the kingdom.

In the past there have been serious abuses and misuse of authority in the Church, as we saw back in the days of Worldwide Church of God. Indeed, what we saw there is that this problem, this issue of ministerial authority has left its mark on many people in the Church. Some people still have not really gotten over that, or gone on with that. It was pretty bad for many people in terms of what was going on.

What it produced today is almost a lack of trust in the ministry, a lack of appreciation and respect, but also, one of not having confidence in the ministry because of the past experiences. It's important that we understand the *true* role and the *true* authority that God puts into the Church, so that we can continue to work together and seek the Kingdom of God.

You may recall at that time, in terms of the Church, the ministry was considered to be the Church of God. The ministry *was* the Church of God and this is where the brethren were ruled over by the whole ministry and authority from the top down. Indeed, it was a hierarchy. In that sense, it was a rulership in all aspects of one's life. This is wrong, brethren. This is not the way it should be, because the ministry usurped God's true authority over the brethren, and *contrary to Scriptures, made it their*

own! Contrary to Scriptures, the approach they had to authority was devastating, as we have already mentioned.

The key thing that it did, it put a man—or an organization—between the brethren, God the Father and Jesus Christ. It put an intermediate between them. *Christ is our only Mediator!* This should not have been.

They twisted the Scriptures to uphold their control and authority over God's people. Clearly, *the ministry is not the government of God!* Yet, in doing so, they took advantage of the people, becoming overlords and dictators, *rather than serving the brethren in love!*

We want to be able to understand what the Scriptures tell us about not only the role of elders, how they should function and what their proper authority is, but also, what are their duties and responsibilities as it integrates into our understanding of the government of God in the Church. Let's follow this closely.

1-Peter 5:1: "*The elders who are among you I exhort, even as a fellow elder, and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that is about to be revealed: Feed the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...*" (vs 1-2). What does this mean? *An elder is an overseer!*

1-Timothy 1:1: "Faithful is the saying, 'If any man aspires to *be an overseer*, he desires a good work.' Now then, it is obligatory *that* the overseer be blameless, *the* husband of one wife, vigilant, serious-minded, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching" (vs 1-2)—some of the guidelines and background. You can read down through here the qualifications of an elder.

Notice the fact that it says, *overseer*. The *King James* says 'bishop.' What is an overseer? *One who watches over like a shepherd watching over a flock of sheep, and also, one who supervises, who is a supervisor, rather than being the harsh ruler and dictating to the people!*

Peter makes this perfectly clear; 1-Peter 5:2: "...exercising oversight... [being an overseer] ...not by compulsion, but willingly; not in fondness of dishonest gain, but *with an eager attitude*; not as exercising lordship over *your* possessions..." (vs 2-3).

Actually, the sheep are *God's* possessions, but in terms of the elder, they are *given authority to watch over* some of God's possessions.

“...but *by* being examples to the flock of God.... [we can see the analogy here with shepherd/sheep and the Church being a *flock of God*] ...And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you shall receive an unfading, *eternal* crown of glory” (vs 3-4).

I did turn to the *Phillips* translation of these three verses. I wanted to read it to you because it gives further clarification, I believe, and deeper meaning of the intent of these verses.

1-Peter 5:1: (*Phillips*): “Now may I who am myself an elder say a word to my fellow elders? I speak as one who actually saw Christ suffer, and as one who will share with you the glories that are to be unfolded. Shepherd your flock of God... [the *Faithful Version* says to “Feed the flock...”]...looking after them not because you feel compelled to, but willingly, as God would wish; never do this work thinking of your personal gain” (vs 1-2).

What a contrast to the government that we have in this country. People go into government, they are poor and they come out rich, because of serving themselves.

Verse 3: (*Phillips*): “Do this work not thinking of your personal gain but with true compassion...”—or love! In other words, he brings in an element that we are, as shepherds/elders to love the sheep, to be able to take care of them

“...you should aim not as being dictators, but examples of Christian living in the eyes of the flock, committed to your charge” (v 3).

I think this helps us get a better idea and more of what the correct orientation of an elder is as it fits into the government of God.

The correct attitude of service that every true elder in the Church should have is express by Christ in Matt. 20, a familiar Scripture but one that we need to acknowledge and realize that this is key to being an elder.

Matthew 20:25: “But Jesus called them to *Him and* said, ‘You know that the rulers of the nations exercise lordship over them, and the great ones exercise authority over them. However, it shall not be this way among you...’” (vs 25-26). He’s talking to the disciples, the future apostles in the Church, and teaching them specifically what their attitude should be.

“...but whoever would become great among you, let him be your servant... [He’s focusing on service to the brethren] ...And whoever would be first among you, let him be your slave... [or bondservant] ...Just as the Son of man did not come

to be served, but to serve, and to give His life *as* a ransom for many” (vs 26-28).

We clearly see that elders are to be humble *first*. They’re not to take any great, grandiose titles or positions other than the fact that *they are servants*. They are to serve the people, to be a blessing and not to be a burden, or one who would throw things into the path of those who are seeking the Kingdom of God. Christ appointed the apostles, and later elders, in the Church for the purpose of helping and serving the brethren to achieve the Kingdom of God.

You can see the picture here: In the government of God you’ve got God the Father, Jesus Christ and the elders are servants serving the purpose by which God has established the Church, according to the Scriptures, not to rule over them in some dictatorial or some hierarchical way. That’s just not what was ever intended. *An elder is not to exercise lordship!*

Lordship is *rulership by dictating and setting down the rules and guidelines*. But we are to helpers of their joy:

- the joy of the Kingdom
- the joy of knowing God

2-Corinthians 1:23—Paul writes to us through the Church at Corinth: “But I call upon God to bear witness of my intentions, that in order to spare you I did not yet come to Corinth; **not that we exercise lordship over your faith, but because we are working with you to increase your joy**. For you stand by faith” (vs 23-24).

A person’s individual faith in God the Father and Christ is the paramount in terms of true rulership in the Church. We’re going to come to that later on. It’s a personal relationship as the key. It’s not necessarily being controlled by a group, organization or any man. We are to be under the control of the Holy Spirit, God the Father and Christ in us.

Paul clearly outlined the purpose of elders in the ministry in Eph. 4. We’re going to go into it a little bit deeper.

Ephesians 4:11: “And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.”

First of all, these are not positions of rank of authority. *These are positions of function or of responsibility!* Clearly, it’s not a matter of ranking of authority or rulership. This becomes really clear as we continue to read.

Verse 12: “For the perfecting of the saints, for *the* work of *the* ministry, for *the* edifying of the Body of Christ; until we all come into the unity of

the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto *the* measure of *the* stature of the fullness of Christ” (vs 12-13).

We can see the molding and the shaping of the brethren through the preaching of the Gospel, through the teaching and by the help of the ministry, that they can be perfected.

Verse 14: “So that we no longer be children, tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men in *cunning* craftiness, with a view to the systematizing of the error; but holding the Truth in love, may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even* Christ” (vs 14-15). Let’s go through and break it down a little bit more:

- **the work of the ministry:** This is one of service, one of giving to and serving of the brethren in love.
- **perfecting the saints:** This is referring to preparing them for the Kingdom. Perfecting the saints in righteousness so that they might walk in the laws and commandments of God and to be perfected.
- **edifying of the Body of Christ:** Edifying means to *lift up, encourage and to teach*. The ministry is to teach, to build up the brethren so that they can be encouraged and they can seek the Kingdom with the right hope and looking forward to the Kingdom.
- **to build unity of the faith:** This is referring to the *oneness* of Spirit through the mind of Christ. How do we have oneness in the Church? *It’s one mind and this is true, the fact that we’re all developing the very mind of our Savior, Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5)!*
- **the knowledge of the Son of God:** We’re talking about the fact that we teach that Christ is ‘the Way, the Truth, and the Life.’
- **unto a perfect man:** The spiritually mature Christian who is fully equipped with those elements God gives through faith and through the Holy Spirit, that they can truly function as a spiritually mature person, who basically is geared and working toward the Kingdom of God.
- **unto the fullness of Christ:** This means to take on the full nature of Who and what Christ was and what He represents today and become like He is.

There’s a lot in this sequence of verses. If you expand on these, you really can see that this is a huge responsibility for elders. It’s only accomplished by the working of the Holy Spirit,

both in the elders and in the brethren. Without the Holy Spirit, this system is not going to work.

Therefore, we can see that the ministers are helpers to Jesus Christ; they’re assisting, supervising, working with Christ and with Christ in us, in every one of us. Christ is in us and ***not just in the ministry!***

Thinking back, it seems like elders back in the old days seemed to not really understand or respect that as much as they should have. Christ has given specific responsibilities, as we can see here, God has also given them responsibility as well as authority to carry out these functions. You cannot give a person responsibility without giving them the authority or the ability to carry out those in a proper way.

That tends to come across to blur the situation a little bit, because now you’re talking about the word *authority*, but it’s *specific* authority. We’re going to go into that in greater detail. You’re going to see that it works well within the context of what it means to be the true government of God in the Church. Christ gave authority, but He also required ***accountability***. If you’ve got responsibility, you’ve got authority, but you’ve got to be accountable to God in how you carry out those functions. We just read that it has to be done:

- in service
- in love
- with due respect
- with loving the brethren
- with teaching the Word of God correctly

All of this has to come together!

If an elder is not doing this, then he’s not being accountable and judgment will be upon that particular individual unless he repents of that attitude of being superior, spiritually, to the brethren. ***An elder is not spiritually superior to the brethren!*** It’s just that God has selected individuals *to carry out various functions* within the Church.

Let’s turn to an example of that, because the Scriptures do use the word ‘authority.’ We need to understand it’s proper context.

Luke 9:1: “Then He called His twelve disciples together *and* gave them **power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases**; and He sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and to heal those who were sick” (vs 1-2).

You can see that Christ delegated specific authority and power to the disciples, who were to become the apostles, to carry out specific functions. The authority and power given is very specific. I wanted to bring that out. It’s not controlling people’s

lives to the point where you are dictating to them and being an overlord.

Before we continue to discuss the roles and responsibilities of elders in the Church. I'd like to focus on how the true government of God functions, or works, in the Church. Then we can better understand how to integrate the role of elders.

As I started working on this particular message, I realized I can't really explain the role of elders until we understand greater insight into the government of God and how it truly needs to function within the Church.

This is going to be brief and each one of these points probably could be expanded out, but I wanted to cover these to give you the overview.

Seven Key Aspects of How the Government of God Operates

It's important to know that the Government of God has a purpose overall; that is to bring those who have the Holy Spirit—those who have been converted—so that they can achieve the Kingdom of God and truly be part of God's Family. That's the purpose of what God is doing with His government, His rulership over His people.

1. The Government in the Church of God is a Theocracy

God the Father and Jesus Christ, the two members of the Godhead are over the Church. Christ is the Head of the Church, *which is a spiritual body* made up of converted people with the Holy Spirit ingrowing in them. In other words, an individual who is converted, who has the Holy Spirit, regardless of any organization or any kind of group that's out there. The Body of Christ is made up of converted individuals all over this earth. *It's one body!*

Colossians 1:18: "And He... [Christ] ...is the Head of the Body, the Church; Who is *the beginning, the Firstborn* from among the dead, so that in all things He Himself might hold the preeminence."

Christ is the Chief Shepherd. He is the Head of the Church, and *all need to look to Christ as the One Who has the power and authority* that has been given to Him.

Matthew 28:18, where Christ said, "... 'All power and authority under heaven has been given to Me.' " I'm just establishing this as something we do know. I'm just putting this into the key aspect of how the government of God functions.

1-Cor. 12—here we're finding that the Body of Christ is one family, not many groups out there. It's one family and we're united together in the

Body of Christ. Let's read some Scriptures to support this, because this is very important to understand.

1-Corinthians 12:12: "For even as **the body is one and has many members, yet, all the members of the one body, though many, are one body**; so also *is* Christ." Is Christ divided? *No! There's one Body of believers!*

Verse 13: "For indeed, by one Spirit we were all baptized into **one body**—whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free—and we were all made to drink into one Spirit. **For the Body of Christ is not one member, but many**" (vs 13-14).

Continuing this idea of the unity of the body, which is explained very clearly in Eph. 4, Paul preaches and teaches:

Ephesians 4:3: "Being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It's interesting when he says it this way that it's *through "...unity of the Spirit..." that we have peace!* If there's division and conflict, we don't have peace. Because there's discord and problems.

Verse 4: "*There is one body and one Spirit*, even as you were also called in one hope of your calling.... [What is our hope? *The great hope of the Kingdom!*] ...One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, Who *is* over all, and through all, and **in you all**" (vs 4-6).

God the Father and Christ *are in you and in me*, because we have been converted and had hands laid on us. In other words, this is the structure. We begin to see how this focuses on:

- the Body, the Church
- its functions
- how it's supposed to work

Verse 7: "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

This is another whole message, here: the gifts that God gives to each and every one of us. The grace and the gifts He gives to us and how they're to be carried out.

We can see here that all members belong to Christ. All members of the Church are His body; they belong to Christ. They don't belong to any organization or any man. We are 'one body' through the Holy Spirit. We are 'sheep' and by obeying the 'Shepherd,' we then demonstrate our voluntary acceptance of being under the government of God.

Do you see the picture that this is making? *It's an individual relationship!* It's not the organization as far as the ministry. Does the ministry serve a key and vital function? *Absolutely!* So, not to

take away from that. Really, the acceptance of Jesus Christ as:

- our Lord
- our Master
- our soon coming King
- our High Priest
- our Mediator
- our Savior

All of this is through voluntary acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior! Christ is our Chief Shepherd and we all are ‘sheep of His pasture.’ This is unity; it’s very important that we understand that.

{Note John 10:14-26}

John 10:27: “My sheep **hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.**” *That’s important to understand!* How do we hear the voice of Christ today? *Through His Word and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!* He does communicate and we need to **hear** what Christ is telling us on how to grow and overcome.

The first point is that Christ is the Head of the Church and we are all ‘sheep of the same pasture.’ *We are all one body!*

2. The True Foundation of God’s Government in the Church is Faith and Love Based on His Grace and Mercy

There’s other things we could expand on this, but the central core of how the government of God works in the Church is based on faith and love, very clearly so.

The faith that God gives us through His Spirit is essential, in that we believe, have trust and confidence in God and in His Word. We have to have that faith. That faith is the ‘faith of Christ in us’; it’s not our own faith. Heb. 11:1 defines faith; the subject of many sermons.

Hebrews 11:1: “Now, faith is *the substance... [or belief] ...of things hoped for, and **the conviction** of things not seen.*” *The internalized belief that what you believe is true and not changeable, solid belief!*

Verse 6: “Now without faith *it is* impossible to please *God*. For it is mandatory *for* the one who comes to God to believe that He exists, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

You can see, again, the dynamics of faith and how it’s important to ‘frame up’ the very framework of the government of God in the Church. Right beside that is love, Divine love. We’re talking about the love of God. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that

everyone who believes in Him may not perish...” For the Church, God loves us now as His children.

1-John 3:1: “Behold! What *glorious* love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God!...”

In other words, He looks upon us now as being His children. He’s looking forward to the time when we can be born into His Family. We are now ‘in the womb’—the womb of the Church—later to be born into His family. The love of God is the key aspect of what it is to have the government of God. God must come first in our lives in every way, in everything. God comes first in our lives. We have to love God (Matt. 20).

Mark 12:30: “And you shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This *is the* first commandment. And *the* second *is* like this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself...” (vs 30-31).

God gives us His love, and we have to reciprocate by loving God back. It’s like a circle. Through that love of God that’s in us, we now are able to demonstrate that we are cooperating, that we’re living in the very Kingdom of God; not yet, but through Christ when He returns.

- How are we to love each other?
- We love God with everything that’s within us, but how are we to love each other?
- How do we love each other?

Jesus explained that in John 13:34^[transcriber’s correction]: “...that you love one another in the same way that I have loved you...” That’s pretty profound and fairly clear. We go back and study how Christ loves us; that’s how we are to love each other. We’re obligated. It’s obligatory that we love one another (1-John 4:11). It’s clear!

What does the love of God produce in terms of the Church? I think we can read some of this in Phil. 2.

Philippians 2:1: “Now then, if *there be* any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love...” Here we see Paul focusing on that love comforts. Love is important; it is the key to the Church and how it functions.

“...if any fellowship of *the* Spirit, if any **deep inner affections and compassions**... [really deep loving care for one another] ...Fulfill my joy, that you be of the same mind, having the same love, being joined together in soul, minding the one thing” (vs 1-2).

Go back and reflect on what we read about the unity of God and the unity of His Spirit working

in us. This is what it produces: “...**being joined together soul, minding the one thing.**” In other words, it brings about unity of spirit, unity of love, and it helps us to come together with the mind of Christ.

Verse 3: “*Let nothing be done through contention or vainglory, but in humility, each esteeming the others above himself.*”

WOW! That’s what true love in you produces if you have compassion and love toward your brother or sister. You will not feel yourself superior or elevated, but you will be humble of spirit and you will consider others better than yourself. That’s the working of the Holy Spirit. That’s the working of love in you.

Verse 4: “Let each one look *not only* after his own things, but *let* each one also **consider the things of others.**” *That’s expansive!*

We’re one family. We’re brothers and sisters. Are we not concerned about the well being of others in the family? *Absolutely!* We love each other. We care for each other. When one suffers, we all suffer. When one is given accolades, then we all glory together for that person. It’s a true family structure. That’s the ideal; that’s what God wants in how the Church is to function. Unfortunately, sometimes we fall short because of the fact that we’re in the world and we are in the flesh.

This is what God is looking for, v 5: “Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in Christ Jesus.” Oh, my! If this could really be epitomized and enlarged in all of us in the Church today, I think we would see that there’d be much more love one for another in the various Churches of God. I think there is love there but it’s guarded. It’s based on a different understanding of different Scriptures, but on the other hand, it’s not to be that way.

Talking about the impact of love on the Body of Christ in the government of God and how it functions:

Colossians 3:10: “And have put on the new man...”—Christ. We just said taking on the ‘mind of Christ.’ Now we put on the ‘new man.’

“...who *is* being renewed in knowledge according to *the* image of Him Who created him” (v 10). Are we to ‘grow in grace and knowledge’ of Christ (2-Pet. 3:18)? *Yes!*

Verse 11: “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian *nor* Scythian, slave *nor* free; but Christ *is* all things, and in all.”

Again, we’re focusing on the unity of Christ in us. That is what unites us: His love, His grace, His mercy.

Verse 12: “Put on then... [individually] ...as *the* elect of God, Holy and beloved, deep inner affections, kindness, humility, meekness *and* long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so also you *should forgive.* And above all these things **put on love, which is the bond of perfection**” (vs 12-14).

We can look at this a see that the love of God is the glue that truly brings us together in unity and in harmony, focusing on this element of knowing the faith of God and believing that He exists. We know Him and we trust Him, but that the love of God truly brings us together.

3. **God’s Word, the Holy Bible, Gives Us the Requirements for One to be Part of the Government of God**

I’m putting this in a little bit different terminology than perhaps you’re used to hearing. The Bible is the Word of God and it gives us:

- His laws
- His statutes
- His judgments

It also shows us:

- how to live
- how to carry out our lives

It also reveals:

- His will
- His purpose
- the future
- the prophesies of the Kingdom of God in the future
- our hope of being in the Kingdom

All of it is there!

You could say that the Bible is *the constitution* of the government of God. That might break down a little bit, but you can see that it’s the foundation of rule, of the laws and of how things operate.

2-Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture... [Old and New Testaments] ...*is* God-breathed...”—God-inspired! God has directed and He has caused the Words to be written.

“...and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (vs 16-17).

I think this is pretty clear of the role of the Bible as far as God’s government. It is the basis of our faith, our belief, our understanding and it teaches us how to live our lives. God’s Word reveals His

Truth and shows us the way to salvation. Indeed, we are to live by every Word of God (Matt. 4:4).

4. God is not a Respector of Persons

This is an important point in some respects that we need to understand: God judges all according to the same standard, by the same judgment. Very clearly, *no man is superior in terms of being above others*, as far as God's concerned. God looks upon the heart! God looks upon the works of that person and whether or not they are truly loving Him.

There is so much to be covered in this. I am just really covering the surface of this topic. I hope this will inspire you to study it deeper.

Romans 2:5^[transcriber's correction]: "But you, according to your own hardness and unrepentant heart, are storing up wrath for yourself against *the* day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment." *The point is that each person as he conducts his life has consequences!*

Verse 6: "Who will render to each one **according to his own works.**" Here's the standard that God follows. It's according to our works and how we live our lives:

- Are we obedient?
- Are we loving God?
- Are we keeping the commandments?

Verse 7: "On the one hand, to those who with **patient endurance in good works** are seeking glory and honor and immortality—eternal life; on the other hand, to those who are **contentious and who disobey the Truth**, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath... [What are they reaping?] ...tribulation and anguish—upon every soul of man who works out evil, both of *the* Jew first, and of *the* Greek; but glory and honor and peace to everyone who works good, both to *the* Jew first, and to *the* Greek, **because there is no respect of persons with God**" (vs 7-11).

That's clear to understand that 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. We all need to repent deeply, to love God and walk in His way. Again, God is not a respector of persons.

5. The True of the Government of God in the Church can be Simply Stated as the Rule of God in an Individual's Heart as Led Through the Works of the Holy Spirit

The true government of God is the rule of God in a person's heart, mind and in his spirit, as they follow the lead of the Holy Spirit and being guided by Christ in them. You have to go back and forth in the Scriptures to find the deeper things out of His Word.

Hebrews 10:15: "And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after He had previously said, "This *is* the covenant that I will establish with them after those days," says *the* Lord: "I will give My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds; and their sins and lawlessness I will not remember ever again"" (vs 15-17).

Here we see the personal indwelling, or the implanting, of the Truth of God through His Holy Spirit. He puts the laws and the statutes—how we conduct our lives—within each of us. Therefore, each of us has a responsibility to respond and to produce the good works of God that He is developing in us. Here we see that this is the relationship of the governed vs the One Who is the Ruler. Here it is right here.

It's through this **personal choice** that a person puts himself under the authority and the rule of God the Father and Jesus Christ! It's through:

- understanding the Truth
- deep repentance
- baptism
- receipt of the Holy Spirit
- the laying on of hands

that a person comes into the authority and the respecting of the government of God!

The one who is converted submits their life to Christ. Totally submits their life in humility to Christ and God the Father *as led by the Holy Spirit!*. How do we do that? *By studying His Word, by putting into practice the great things that God teaches us so that we can be at-one with Him!* That's the ultimate goal! We can read that in John 17:21-23, in Christ's prayer to His Father. He prayed that all that He has called could be at-one with Christ and one with the Father.

These Scriptures really tie in to what I'm trying to say. We have to understand how the Church of God functions, then we can understand more about the role of the elders in the Church. We talked about the Holy Spirit being in us, guiding and directing us to love God, to serve Him and do His will.

Romans 8:14: "For as many as are led by **the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.**" Think about that! We read to go over that sometimes. If **you're led** by the Holy Spirit, what does that mean? If you're **not** led by the Holy Spirit, you're **not** the children or the sons of God. It's pretty interesting to tear that apart and look at it more clearly.

Verse 15: "Now, you have not received a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you have received **the Spirit of sonship...**" We are the truly,

begotten sons and daughters of God the Father and brother to Jesus Christ.

“...whereby we call out, ‘Abba, Father’” (v 15)—*a personal term of fondness and of love in terms of our relationship with God the Father!*

Verse 16: “The Spirit itself bears witness conjointly with our own spirit, *testifying that we are the children of God.*”

When we look at this in context, we can see how this fits into what I just said. It’s the rule of God in our heart through the Spirit that truly establishes the true government of God. {note booklet: *Is the Ministry God’s Government?* Fred goes through and answers that question in detail. That was the key point that he brought out in that booklet.

What happened to the consequences of this? It’s kind of interesting, it turns out that the Church should be *self-policing and self-correcting!* How does that work? If we love each other as family and if we truly are following the government of God within our hearts, we’re going to work as a group to deal with issues and problems such as offences.

Matt. 18:15-17—we’ve read over that many times—says how to deal with offences in the Church. You don’t read right there that it says that if you have an offence you go to the minister and get it solved. *No!* What does it say? *If you have a problem or an issue of offence with a brother or sister, you go to them—self-correcting!* You correct the issue internally. You don’t look to some higher power to come in and to direct that. You have responsibility to do that yourself. Why? *Because God wants the members to be united, reconciled and to love each other and not have contention or problems!*

The other thing is that it states in Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in some offense... [sin] ...you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.”

We are our brother’s keeper. We are to go to our brother to help them in a spirit of love and humility to help them reestablish their lives and to overcome issues that they’re dealing with in their lives. We help each other; we serve each other.

Verse 2: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ”—*love one another as I have loved you!*’

We in the Church are to *admonish* one another (Rom. 15:14)—*to correct and to help one another in love.* It’s correction with love. We see that it’s an internal operation because we’re one body, one family. We love each other, therefore, it’s self-correcting. The ministry is there to guide and to facilitate understanding but it’s up to the members to

work together, to love each other and to serve each other.

6. The Government of God in the Church Produces Right Results

This is an overview in some respects. The government of God in the Church produces right results when a few of things need to happen:

- members are truly converted by the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit

The Church is not meant for the unconverted; I think we all can agree with that. Don’t misunderstand me; God wishes that all the whole world to be converted, but the Church today is made up of those who are converted. It doesn’t work if you’re unconverted.

- when we truly love God and each other from the heart and obey His Word
- when the fruits of God’s Spirit are manifested by the consequences of *the mind of Christ being in us*

With the fruits of the Holy Spirit, we are able to share and give to others as well as exemplifying truly that the works of God are being done in us. Again, the fruits of God’s Spirit are the outer proof that the Holy Spirit is working.

- when we *worship God in spirit and in Truth*

There’s much more that can be added to this, but you can see what I’m saying: *certain conditions have to be met in order for the system to work efficiently and effectively!* God’s Word is the Truth and if we follow and do what He says and follow it to under that, then we have:

- peace
- unity
- oneness of spirit of mind

This is what results; this is what Paul was exhorting the Corinthians to do, to come together because they were in a state of disarray, dissention and conflict.

1-Corinthians 1:10: “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing... [in truth] ...and *that* there be no divisions among you; rather, *that* you be knit together in the same mind... [mind of Christ] ...and in the same judgment.” *This is showing the good results of how the Kingdom of God needs to work!*

Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” That’s a wonderful thing, brethren. Indeed, we’re

still striving and still working toward that. That's the goal.

Going back to what we were talking about with the elders, in understanding the facets or the aspects of the government of God.

7. Christ Gives Specific Authority to Elders and to the Ministry According to the Responsibilities They have been Given

If they've not been given responsibilities, then they do not have authority to work in that. I hope you understand what we're saying, here.

Let's understand that *there is a right form of authority in the Church!* Obviously, we have the authority of Christ; there's no question there. Elders are working in the field like a true shepherd of God's people. God is not the 'author of confusion.' There has to be order. There has to be some structure by which things are planned out, executed and carried out. If there wasn't some sense of authority in terms of dealing with structure, then there would be confusion. That's the key thing. There has to be someone who has been *delegated by Christ* through being an elder in terms of how things are to be run.

Does that mean that the elder is going to just come down and come up with his own ideas? *No!* He's going to work with the group; it's a family. We're going to talk about this and we're going to see how we can best efficiently accomplish what God would have us be doing, but someone has to be making these final decisions. We all can appreciate that.

The book of Titus is where we can see the instructions that Paul gives to him and goes along these same lines. I go to these Scriptures because some people may feel that there is no authority within the Church and we all just have to vote on things and come to an agreement by not having that line of authority.

Titus 1:4: "To Titus, a true son according to our common faith: Grace, mercy *and* peace from God *the* Father and *the* Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. For this cause I left you in Crete, **so that you might set in order the things that needed to be done, and might ordain elders in every city, as I commanded you**" (vs 4-5).

What's happening here? *Structure is being put together so that things can be done peacefully, things can be done in a unified fashion as God would have it done!*

Paul was designated to be the apostle to the Gentiles. He went into the Roman world to preach the Gospel.

- Could he do it alone?
- Could he do it by himself?
- *No, he needed help!*

That's why he was appointing elders in every city, so that things could be properly done.

1-Corinthians 14:33: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the Churches of the saints."

Paul gives further directions to Titus, to teach and to preach (Titus 2). He does give specific things that Titus was to do. Titus was being authorized. He was given authority to do these things.

Titus 2:13: "Looking for the blessed hope and *the* appearing of the glory of our Savior and great God, Jesus Christ; Who gave Himself for us, so that He might redeem us from all lawlessness..." (vs 13-14). This is a little bit off the topic, but notice what He says:

"...and might purify for Himself a unique people, **zealous of good works. Speak these things, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority...**" (vs 14-15).

We see a specific function that an elder has that is to *rebuke* those who are speaking deception, false doctrines and bringing in discord and division. In other words, *to rebuke* those who are working against the government of God.

Let's just explain some Scriptures that Titus was given the authority:

- to exhort
- to preach
- to rebuke
- to do certain things

I'm going to have you put down some of these Scriptures, because we're not going to have a chance to go through all of them.

2-Tim. 4:1-4 is a whole section dealing with Paul teaching Timothy about how elders were to perform specific responsibilities. I'll just quickly summarize:

He *charged* Timothy means that *you give authority*. When you *charge* somebody to do something, *you give them command or authority to do something*. Timothy was charged to convict, to rebuke and to encourage. These are things that elders are to do. Authority is given to elders, but it's with specific duties; they're accountable to God. *Their judgment is going to be upon them if they do not...*

James 3:1: "My brethren, do not many of you become teachers... [elders] ...knowing that we will receive more severe judgment"—based upon if

you're doing good, or if you're doing wrong. There's going to be more serious judgment upon one who is an elder both for good and for wrong.

Hebrews 13:17: "Follow your leaders, and be submissive, because they are looking out for your spiritual well-being, as *those who must be* ready to give an account *to God*..." With that responsibility upon an elder, if they read and understand this, they will take seriously how they treat, respect and deal with brethren.

"...in order that they may do this with joy, and not *with* groaning because that *would be* unprofitable for you" (v 17). What Paul is instructing, here is that brethren are to have proper respect for the positions of elders in the Church for their duty's sake, recognizing that God will be judging them if indeed they do things incorrectly.

Also, it says *to follow*. You follow the leaders as they follow Christ. You don't follow them into wrong conduct, you follow them as they follow Christ. *Be submissive* is, in a sense, an element of cooperation. This is an element of cooperating with the elders for the common good/goal. It's not the idea that someone will back up and submit. *No!* It's the element of cooperating and working with in a spirit of unity.

They do this because they are doing it with deep concern for the brethren, for their spiritual well-being because they are going to be held accountable to serve the brethren according to God's will and purpose.

There are a number of specific duties and responsibilities that I could go over. I've gone over a number of them already:

- to preach and teach the Gospel
- to guard the flock *from*:
 - ✓ division
 - ✓ dissention
 - ✓ false doctrines
 - ✓ false teachers

That is something that is very, very important. An elder has to be on guard for the flock, just as a shepherd guards against wolves, bears and what not. Also, he is to conduct certain services to the brethren:

- baptisms
- funerals
- marriages
- blessing little children
- laying on of hands after praying for the sick
- support
- inspire
- encourage

- edify
- lift up

This is the function of elders! Hopefully, we can understand that in a better way.

A couple years ago a manual was produced for the elders called *The Manual For Elders*. It was especially for new elders coming into CBCG, that they would understand responsibilities and roles in being an elder. I want to read from one part of it.

From: *The Manual For Elders*

There's a great responsibility Christ gives to each elder who must spiritually be mature and capable of leading the brethren in the same way that Christ instructed the apostles. Every elder needs to know that the brethren belong to Christ and that they are there to serve the brethren in the same way that Christ served and loved the Church and gave Himself for it. Elders are to apply the Words of Christ in their ministry that Christ spoke to Peter in John 21:15-17:

John 21:15: "Therefore, when they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, *son of Jonas*, do you love Me more than these?' *And* he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, *son of Jonas*, do you love Me?' *And* he said to Him, 'Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, *son of Jonas*, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' *And* he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep'" (vs 15-17).

You can go into the whole message of how a shepherd takes care of the sheep and you'll get the idea of what we're talking about, here.

Elders are to feed and shepherd the sheep in love as they love God, with all their heart, soul and being. The same way the Apostle Paul admonished the elders in Ephesus, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among you whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

An elder must always teach and treat each of the brethren with respect, love, kindness and in a manner that will not cause the

little ones to be offended. Indeed, in order to serve the brethren in a Christ-like manner, an elder must be continually asking God for guidance, for wisdom through daily prayer and in the study of His Word. Above all, an elder must remain humble in spirit and not to elevate himself above the brethren.

To conclude, I hope this message has been helpful, perhaps by looking at some elements that may have been confusing in dealing with aspects of true eldership and what it means as it incorporates into the true government of God.

Let us thank God for His Truth and let the knowledge of how God's government works in the Church inspire us and help us to truly look forward to being a part of His eternal family!

- 1-John 4:11
- 2-Peter 3:18
- Matthew 4:4
- John 17:21-23
- Matthew 18:15-17
- Romans 15:14
- 2-Timothy 4:1-4

Also Referenced: Booklets:

- *Is the Ministry God's Government?* by Fred R. Coulter
- *The Manual for Elders*

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All Scripture from *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order, A Faithful Version* (except where noted)

Scriptural References:

- 1) 1-Peter 5:1-2
- 2) 1-Timothy 3:1-2
- 3) 1-Peter 5:2-4, 1-3
- 4) Matthew 20:25-28
- 5) 2-Corinthians 1:23-24
- 6) Ephesians 4:11-15
- 7) Luke 9:1-2
- 8) Colossians 1:18
- 9) Matthew 28:18
- 10) 1-Corinthians 12:12-14
- 11) Ephesians 4:3-7
- 12) John 10:27
- 13) Hebrews 11:1, 6
- 14) 1-John 3:1
- 15) Mark 12:30-31
- 16) John 13:34
- 17) Philippians 2:1-5
- 18) Colossians 3:10-14
- 19) 2-Timothy 3:16-17
- 20) Romans 2:5-11
- 21) Hebrews 10:15-17
- 22) Romans 8:14-16
- 23) Galatians 6:1-2
- 24) 1-Corinthians 1:10
- 25) Psalms 133:1
- 26) Titus 1:4-5
- 27) 1-Corinthians 14:33
- 28) Titus 2:13-15
- 29) James 3:1
- 30) Hebrews 13:17
- 31) John 21:15-17

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- John 10:14-26