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# Doctrinal Outlines

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## GOVERNMENT IN GOD'S CHURCH

### I. Introduction

- A. Which form of government is proper for the Church? Incredible as it seems, while most thinking people have at least paused to ponder the merits of various civil governments, hardly anybody stops to notice the type of government in the church he or she attends, or to ask if it is indeed biblical.
- B. This ignorance is dangerous! For how can a church claim to be true unless its very foundation -- its government -- is patterned after the heavenly rather than the earthly?
- C. You need to understand how the government of God's true Church is designed, and how it must operate.

### II. The Basic Doctrine

- A. God's government in His Church is a theocracy, with Christ at the helm and God's chosen ministers fulfilling responsibilities under Christ in the form of a pyramidal hierarchy.
- B. It is a government of faith, in which the leaders submit their wills to Christ and the members trust God to administer His Church through those leaders.

### III. The Usual Teachings of This World

- A. It takes no great thought to see that the governments of the churches of established Christianity find themselves far afield of the biblical model.
- B. Many churches are democracies, in which the members elect their officials to run the church and even hire and fire the ministers. Others are partial democracies, in that their prime leader is voted into office, although lesser officials may then be appointed.
- C. Some churches have independent local governments that send representatives to larger councils to decide important matters, while others have religious patriarchs who make the decisions by themselves.

- D. Still other churches seem to be governed by a sort of "survival of the fittest" rule, in which those who have the necessary political savvy vault themselves into top leadership positions.

#### IV. The Bible Teaching

A. Just what is the proper government for God's true Church? How does it work? How are its leaders appointed? Who keeps the leaders on the right track?

\* B. No serious Bible student could successfully argue, based upon the Scriptures or upon the laws of logic, that the Bible propounds any governmental structure except that in which God is the living head. Thus it is a theocracy, which means a government by God.

C. Indeed, God the Father is supreme commander of all things, including the Church. Even Christ stated: "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).

D. Even so, the Bible directly states that Jesus Christ has been delegated the overall direction of the affairs of the Church. Read Ephesians 1:22, 5:23 and Matthew 16:16-18.

E. Although the Scriptures clearly pronounce Jesus to be the Church's Head, the government of the Church does not cease with Christ.

1. Christ is the cornerstone of the government, He appoints men to official positions under Him as parts of the governmental foundation.

\* 2. In Ephesians 2:19-20 Paul states the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

F. In the New Testament, the offices of government are primarily those of the ministry, with other administrative offices being filled by qualified lay persons as necessary.

1. Ephesians 4:11 states: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

2. I Corinthians 12:28 mentions other unordained offices that fill administrative functions.

G. It is plain from these verses that although all ministers are "elders" (a general term roughly equivalent with "minister"), all ministers are not of equal rank or responsibility.

- H. Verses such as I Timothy 5:17 and I Corinthians 5:1-5 prove that God has given the ministry authority to govern and not merely to preach truth without being able to enforce it within the Church.
- I. Hence we see that the Church is governed through its officers, the ministry, according to their individual ranks and functions, under the direction of Jesus Christ, who Himself is subject to God the Father.
- J. But of supreme importance are two remaining questions regarding proper government in the Church.
1. Who appoints the ministers in the Church and how?
  2. Since the leaders of the Church are appointed and not elected, who keeps the leaders on track and guides their actions to ensure they remain steadfast?
- K. To begin with the first question, ministers are appointed to their posts and ordained to their ranks by the Church, through the other ministers who are already ordained. This in accordance with clear biblical directives.
1. Christ told His disciples that they had not chosen Him, but that He had chosen them (John 15:16).
  2. They were not voted in nor did they volunteer.
  3. Further, the apostles were commanded by God to ordain others (Acts 13:1-3), and Paul directed that qualified men be ordained (Titus 1:5).
- L. This process of ordination is not capricious, at the whim of either the individual who does the ordination or the one to be ordained.
1. The person considered for ordination must first meet the qualifications of the position, as described in I Timothy 3:1-7.
  2. In addition, proof must exist that he is called to the job by God. That proof must be found in the form of the fruits of his life, which exhibit themselves to the existing ministry of the Church (Matthew 7:15-16).
  3. These important decisions may be accompanied by much prayer and fasting (Acts 13:3)
- M. As can be seen, the office of the ministry is not something for which one can volunteer or something one can choose for himself in the traditional sense.

N. Because ministers are appointed by those above them in the chain of authority, one might wonder how the chief minister of the Church, the pastor general, is chosen, and by whom.

1. In the case where an existing pastor general anticipates his own death or disability, he may, after prayer and wise counsel, himself appoint a qualified successor. (Barton)

2. If he dies or becomes disabled without having appointed a successor, the ministers of highest rank in the Church would appoint a successor according to God's will after prayer.

3. If no such appointment were made, God would by circumstances of His own design thrust the man of His choice into the forefront of the Work (even against the man's own will if necessary -- see Jonah 1 and 2).

O. It must be stressed that God chooses the man appointed to the job of pastor general. The individual did not choose himself. It is not something for which a man can volunteer. Neither is it the choice of the man or men who may appoint him, although they might be used as human agents to discover God's will and then implement it. The choice is God's.

P. God places each member of the Church into whatever responsibility in the Church pleases Him (I Corinthians 12:18).

Q. All that has been said thus far about government in the Church highlights the need to understand the second question posed above: Since Church leaders are appointed and not voted into office, and since, therefore, the members are not watchdogs over the leaders, who is responsible for keeping these leaders on track spiritually and administratively?

1. The answer is that God's government in His Church is a government of faith. Simply put, this means members believe that behind the physical, outward appearance of the Church, is the unseen hand of Jesus Christ, who directs its affairs.

2. True Christians today trust Christ to direct the Church, bless it, correct it or its officers if need be and steer its general course.

3. From the time of Moses and the rebellion of Korah (a leader in the congregation who was killed by God for insubordination -- Numbers 16), through

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1. In the case where an existing pastor general anticipates his own death or disability, he may, after prayer and wise counsel, himself designate a qualified successor.
  2. If he dies or becomes disabled without having appointed a successor, the Advisory Council of Elders in the Church would designate a successor according to God's will after prayer.
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1. The answer is that God's government in His Church is a government of faith. Simply put, this means members believe that behind the physical, outward appearance of the Church, is the unseen hand of Jesus Christ, who directs its affairs.
  2. True Christians today trust Christ to direct the Church, bless it, correct it or its officers if need be and steer its general course.
  3. From the time of Moses and the rebellion of Korah (a leader in the congregation who was killed by God for insubordination -- Numbers 16), through the age of the apostles and the rejection of Judas Iscariot from his apostleship, to the present day, Christ has demonstrated His ability to:
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the age of the apostles and the rejection of Judas Iscariot from his apostleship, to the present day, Christ has demonstrated His ability to:

- a. run His Church,
- b. place capable men in their proper positions,
- c. discipline those who need it,
- d. and reject from His Church those unfit to wear the Christian mantle.

4. The very existence of the Church and the Church's continuing vitality proves this beyond dispute!

#### V. Key Verses

Here are a some important scriptures to specially note:

- A. Ephesians 1:22, 5:23 -- Christ is the Head of the Church.
- B. Ephesians 2:19-20 -- the foundation of Church government is key men upon the cornerstone of Jesus Christ.
- C. Ephesians 4:11 and I Corinthians 12:28 -- offices of the ministry are listed in terms of rank.
- D. I Corinthians 5:1-5 and I Timothy 5:17 -- ministers have authority to rule.
- E. Acts 13:1-3, Titus 1:5, I Timothy 3:1-7 -- ministers are appointed by God's will according to their qualifications.
- F. I Corinthians 12:7-10, 18 -- Christ places men into various offices as it pleases Him.

#### VI. Conclusion

Yes, though men through the millennia have struggled to form effective governments for their nations, they have left virtually unnoticed the question of proper church government. But God has not neglected His Church, and has put within it the cornerstone of His Son Jesus, and the foundation of those He has called to serve as leaders in His Church with power and vigor.





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