

“I Will Build My Church – Part 5”
“Church Government”
Mark 8:27-29; Matthew 16:13-20
(Preached at Trinity, December 7, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. For several Wednesday night sermons I’ve directed your attention to **Matt. 16:18**
Matthew 16:18 NAU - "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."
We’ve seen the identify of the “Rock” – Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus alone is the bedrock upon which the church is built. It is upon this foundation that the church stands invincible and victorious until the end – “the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”
2. For several sermons I’ve directed your attention to the subject of the Church of Christ.
I will build My church -
Tonight I’ll bring the fifth installment in this six part series.
 - A. First, I distinguished between the church universal and the local church.
The church described in the NT is primarily a visible organization
Dietrich Bonhoeffer – “The Body of Christ can only be a visible Body, or else it is not a Body at all.”
 - B. Second, I established Christ as the Creator of the church focusing on the personal pronouns - “I will build My church”
 1. “I will build” - Jesus is the master builder of the church – both universal and local. It is of His making. Churches find their existence in Christ. Every church is formed under His authority and with His blessing. Without His authority and blessing a church cannot be said to be a church.
 2. “My church” – It implies ownership – possession. The church is the beloved Bride of Christ, chosen in eternity and the great object of Christ’s love as He came to die upon the cross.
“upon this rock I will build My church”
 - C. Then we gave some attention to the nature of the word itself.
ἐκκλησία - from a compound of ἔκ – from out of, and καλέω – to call;
 1. Although the word was used for several hundred years before the Christian era to describe any assembly of people in the New Testament the word takes on a particular meaning. The church is NOT not just any assembly like a Union meeting, PTA, AA, Lions, etc.
 2. The Church used in the NT sense is an assembly of God’s people—united with Christ and united with one another. We share a particular unity unknown anywhere else in the world.
 - D. Last time I directed your attention to the particular question: “What is the definition, purpose, and function of the Church?”
 1. It is a body formed under the authority & power of Christ for the purpose of worship, discipleship, evangelism, and benevolence.

2. Tonight I want to direct your attention to another important aspect of the church. And once again it is a subject that has brought disagreement and debate throughout the history of the church—the Government of the Church. It is not a small matter. It's because of a failure to follow the basic Biblical structure for the church that the church has suffered many abuses and often great weakness throughout history.

I. The various positions practiced

A. Episcopalianism

1. The early church soon developed a centralized government with regional bishops gaining increasing power
2. The Episcopalian form of church government—one man governing those under him, the archbishop, pope, etc.
3. Roman Catholicism has followed this line of church government.

B. Congregationalism

1. The rule of the church is given to every member and the independence of every congregation from all others.
2. Authority rests with the congregation and all decisions rest within the democratic body. Every member within the congregation has the same authority as every other.
3. Each church enjoys absolute independence or autonomy. The congregation is subject to no external jurisdiction.

C. Presbyterianism

1. The rule of the church by multiple, elected elders -- not the rule or opinions of one man, nor those of the whole congregation.
2. The congregations are connected with one another under the jurisdiction of the presbytery.

D. Which of these are correct? And does it matter?

1. First of all, why does it matter? It matters greatly because the church is not our own. It belongs to Christ and He has the right to build us according to His pleasure. "I will build My church"
 - a. We should seek to order the affairs of our church according to His design
 - b. We are always most happy when we are conformed to God's will.
 - c. Many of the problems in churches today could be resolved if they functioned in a Biblical manner.
2. There are several things the NT makes clear regarding the local church
 - a. We find no examples of churches completely independent from other churches. This means the rise of independent unconnected churches we see in modern times cannot be justified Biblically. This also invalidates the modern house church movement. Those attracted to the house church movement are almost always anti-structure and anti-authority with a desire for independence.
 - b. The Bible doesn't find examples of churches functioning as a pure democracy. Instead, we find churches led by elders.

- c. We find no examples of churches governed by deacons
The deacons were not chosen as overseers of the church or administrators over the ministry of the church. They were chosen as servants to aid the ministerial office.
- d. We find no examples of single pastor churches

II. How should a church govern itself?

- A. First, we need to understand that ultimately, the church does not govern itself
 - 1. Jesus is very active in the oversight of His churches
Writing to the elders of the church Peter refers to Jesus as the “Chief Shepherd”
1 Peter 5:1-4 NAS - "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."
 - 2. John witnessed the abiding presence of Jesus dwelling in the midst of His churches
Revelation 1:12-13 NAS - " And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle."
Listen to our Lord's words to His churches:
To Ephesus:
Revelation 2:2-3 NAU - "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be false*; ³ and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary."
To Smyrna:
Revelation 2:9 NAU - "I know your tribulation and your poverty"
To Thyatira:
Revelation 2:19 NAU - "I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first."
To Sardis:
Revelation 3:1-2 NAU - "I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God."

3. What would He speak to us—or what *does* He speak to us? Our church belongs to Him.

This is so easy for us to forget. We can begin to see this church as our church. We can get caught up in personal preferences and endless ideas and opinions. We must be careful to seek Christ in all things.

4. We also need to understand that Jesus delegates authority within His church. He has not left His church without leadership.

B. What form of government has Jesus ordained for His church?

1. In some matters we find authority given to the church

a. Church government that excludes the congregation altogether fails to meet the Biblical standard.

b. The right to receive and dismiss members rests upon the congregation.

This is particularly important as we consider church discipline. Church discipline should be conducted under the authority of the congregation

Matthew 18:15-18 NAS - "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ "But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷ "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. ¹⁸ "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 ESV - "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

c. We can also find the role of the church in choosing its leaders

Acts 6:2-5 NAS - "And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³ "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch."

d. But we do not find the church functioning as a democracy

2. The normal governing of the church is delegated to the elders or pastors of the church

1 Timothy 3:4-5 NAS - "*He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?);"*

We can see this rule in the Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:5-6 NAS - "But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." ⁶ And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter."

- C. The elders are to function as a plurality - There is a consistent principle of plurality taught in the New Testament

1. There is no doubt that the church of Jerusalem had multiple elders
Acts 21:17-18 NAU - "After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸ And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present."
2. This wasn't just a strange exception. This was the consistent practice
Acts 14:23 NAU - "When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."
Titus 1:5 NAU - " For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,"
3. Paul writes to multiple elders in the church of Philippi.
Philippians 1:1 NAU - "Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:" - ἐπίσκοπος
4. Again, we find there were multiple elders at Ephesus
Acts 20:17 NAU - " From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church."
5. James instructed the sick believer to call for the elders (plural) of the church (singular).
James 5:14 NAU - " Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;"
6. A careful study of the NT reveals the absence of churches with a single pastor – In other words there is no such thing as “The Pastor”
 - a. Paul writes to Timothy, the pastor of Ephesus, but we've already seen that Ephesus had multiple elders
 - b. Hebrews 13:17 commands obedience to pastoral oversight but notice also the plural pronouns
Hebrews 13:17 – “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.”

- D. Among the elders there seems to be a distinction

1. The letters to the seven churches were addressed to the “angel” of each church – the word is singular and most interpret this to be the pastor.

2. Paul writes to Timothy, the pastor of Ephesus, but we've already seen that Ephesus had multiple elders. Timothy was functioning as the lead pastor.
3. Again, the church of Jerusalem had many elders but James spoke as their leader
Acts 15:13 NAS - "And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me."
4. Elders occupy the same office and share many of the same duties: They are the spiritual overseers, the rule, teach, and shepherd and ordain other elders – but they may have distinct differences according to their gifts.
 - a. Some elders may have the gift of administration with the ability to organize the educational programs and guide other Christians in the use of their gifts.
 - b. Others may have a particular gift of compassion with the ability to visit the sick, comfort the hurting, and counsel the troubled.
5. Among the elders there also seems to be a separation of those who preach full time. Some distinguish between lay elders and vocational elders
1 Timothy 5:17 NAS - " Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."
 - a. These men obviously need to have theological training
 - b. They will spend the majority of their time in study
 - c. This will usually be a fulltime paid position
1 Timothy 5:17 NAS - " Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."
 - d. Any of the elders would be able to fill the pulpit – all are apt to teach, all have oversight over the congregation.

Conclusion:

1. It should be our great desire to give our selves to continually strive to conform our church to the Biblical standards in every way. We must hold high the principle: semper reformanda – always reforming
2. This church belongs to Christ. He is the Head. He holds all authority. We must be continually upon our knees seeking the throne of God for His aid.
3. Only when we seek to hold Him high and love Him supremely and serve Him faithfully and love one another in mercy and humility can we expect to keep our candle burning brightly among the churches.