

Local Church Decision Making and Voting

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Introduction: Some of the Biblical truths that are shared here may be new to many readers or come across as hard-hitting or somewhat confrontational. But read this entire minibook as I will balance out some of the issues toward the end. The goal of this teaching is to challenge the reader to more scriptural understanding and attitudes on the subject. The reader will probably have to read all my writings on church government issues to get the whole "spirit" of what I am teaching. The reader is not required to agree with me on my every observation but should feel compelled to examine the scriptural principles set forth.

DECISION MAKING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Read Act chapter 15 slowly.

Who makes decisions concerning the affairs of the local church? Who's in charge? Who is accountable before God? A deacon board? An administrative board? A council of Elders? A committee? These questions plague Christians around the world. Acts chapter 15 is the model for decision making in the local church. We see a beautiful picture here of godly church government. This is a New Testament SNAPSHOT! From this chapter we discover that the whole Jerusalem church congregation had a VOICE. In other words, any member of the church was welcome to VOICE their comments or suggestions on any issue. Then the apostles and elders (staff missionaries and pastoral staff) gave their ADVICE. Please note that no one VOTED. The church members DIDN'T VOTE. The apostles and elders DIDN'T VOTE.

Nowhere in the Old or New Testament is there such a thing as VOTING. The church is God's kingdom; or in other words, it is a THEOCRACY not a DEMOCRACY. (As a side note: In America we worship the concept of democracy because it has worked well for our young nation. But we forget that in other cultures and other periods of history, other forms of government have worked well. In all forms of government sin arises from time to time and despots or fools manifest themselves.) There is only two recorded instances in the Bible that I can recall of people trying to take a vote. They are in Numbers chapters 13, 14, and 16. Ten of the twelve spies voted not to go into the Promised Land as God commanded Moses. The consequences were disastrous. The other instance of VOTING was when Korah and a group of Moses' church staff members led a rebellion. Together they took a vote and nearly unanimously agreed to remove Moses as Senior Pastor and give everyone COEQUAL AUTHORITY. God didn't approve of their homespun democracy, so all of them died premature deaths, as the judgment of God was unleashed. Today, most the church world has lost its power, poignancy, and salt by getting bogged down in church bureaucracy. The average local church changes and moves forward at a snail's pace, at the very best. Why? Most of the church world is paralysed with "dotting their I's" and crossing their T's". Most of their time is spent trying to get people together to vote on trivial issues. While the church spins their wheels on trivialities, the world around us is perishing on harsh realities!

Now lets look again at Acts 15. Notice that after the people were allowed to give their VOICE, and after the church staff gave their ADVICE, then one man made the VOLITION, or "judgment", or the FINAL DECISION on the matter. One man had to make a VOLITION as to what he believed God's VOTE was. So someone did vote...it was God! Combining this chapter and other references to James in the Bible, as well as documented historical data; there is no question that James was the Senior Pastor of the church of Jerusalem. Notice that it was the Senior Pastor, not a committee, or some other GROUP that made the FINAL DECISION. You see, in a local church everyone is of COEQUAL VALUE to God. There are no "BIG ME'S AND LITTLE YOU'S". And in the local church there can be COEQUAL MINISTRY; meaning the Senior Pastor may have other gifted speakers or ministers on the church staff as well as responsible and gifted laymen. But both scripture and proven experience teach us that there CANNOT be COEQUAL AUTHORITY in the local church any more

than there can be COEQUAL AUTHORITY between a school teacher and her classroom of students. Similarly, each person in a family unit has COEQUAL VALUE and COEQUAL IMPORTANCE. The wife is just as valuable as the husband. The children are just as much important people as the parents. However, COEQUAL AUTHORITY in the family is what we would call CHAOS! Another example... the workplace. The employee has coequal value as his employer. But the employee does NOT have coequal authority as his employer... coequal authority would result in anarchy and company bankruptcy. These truths may not "suit our taste" or fit our "American traditions", but they are BIBLE!!

After the people of Acts were able to give a VOICE, the church staff was able to give wise ADVICE, and after Pastor James made the FINAL DECISION or VOLITION considering the VOICE, the ADVICE, and the SCRIPTURE; EVERYONE supported the decision. They stood together as a united voice.

The Bible precedent is that "WHEN GOD HAS A PLAN, HE HAS A MAN." This truth is a thread throughout the whole Bible. This doesn't mean that God doesn't need the whole church to fulfill the vision. On the contrary, the Senior Pastor is commissioned to equip the "laymen" to minister. But the decision making of the local church heads up in the office of Senior Pastor, who may also appoint committees to steer certain areas or delegate some of his decision making authority and responsibility to other persons with certain expertise or gifts. If congregations will get hold of this truth, then world evangelization could happen swiftly. God is "bored with boards" who impede the progress of the local church by "holding up the pastor" rather than "holding up the pastor's arms" as Aaron and Hur did for Moses on the mount.

One thing, however, that must be stated here is that local churches and man's traditions don't change overnight. If a pastor finds himself serving in a traditional church where a traditional form of church government is already established, he should NOT try to change it. This will, without fail, backfire! The people have not been taught. Or more accurately, the people have been taught erroneously. Furthermore they have been steeped and trained in their traditions for decades.

Their traditional form of church government has even reinforced their beliefs about this issue. Why? Because the traditional form has itself spawned the very results of lame-duck ministry they expected. "Pastors come and pastors go; so we must be in charge!" "Pastors can go sour; so we must set up exhaustive checks and balances and endless red tape to prevent such." "We'll hire them; we'll fire them!" But the book of Acts never portrays a "deacon board." (See my minibook "Local Church Government" for balanced practical advice on this subject.) Yes, the book of Acts and the New Testament do establish the office of "deacon." But New Testament deacons didn't run or govern the churches. Look up all the "deacon" references in your own Bible... the business the deacons were appointed over was not the financial decisions or governing the church - it was serving tables, taking food to widows, helping (not resisting) the ministry leaders, and serving in practical ways. Even in the book of Acts the church did not vote on who would be the deacons. Yes, the apostles DID ask the people to recommend faithful members to serve as deacons; but then the apostles APPOINTED them. The governing of the church was NOT from the bottom-up but from the top-down. Read it for yourself. And the funny thing is this: In the Book of Acts, people were not appointed to positions of deacon and other offices until the church's membership was in the thousands. But today every little local church thinks they have to have scores of associate pastors, elders, deacons, department heads, titles, committees, and boards BEFORE they even reach 50-200 members. Everybody is so wrapped up with the running of the church (and inevitably disagreements in the tedious process) that there is no time left for the mission of the church. The average local church has lost the manifested glory in their church services, has banned the manifestations of the Spirit's gifts (1 Co 12-14), has lost the acute sense of God's presence in their worship by antiquated culturally irrelevant styles, has been through numerous church splits, annual church arguments, pastors coming, pastors resigning, pastors exasperated, members bored, members angry, some truly called pastors who became frustrated, some immature pastors not ready for the responsibility, and finally some un-anointed and un-called pastors who never should have been there in the first place. The result is "lame-duck ministers and a lame-duck church." A church then resorts to liturgy, procedures, formal methods, ritual, bureaucracy and red tape to fill the time and void of true spiritual energy and vision. The pastor can't lead and can't feed freely. Thus the people are spiritually frustrated

and empty. And the pastor grows unhappy. And so the people want change. (And it could never be our traditions that need changing; it must be the pastor that's the problem.) And so goes the vicious cycle for decades to come. Meantime the unchurched community laughs and mocks the sad saga of "that church", excusing themselves from a relationship with Christ because they don't want to be a part of that political mess at "that church."

A pastor, however, should never force these newly discovered Bible truths on the people; but should store up the ideal snapshot from book of Acts in his heart. Then he should endeavor to walk diplomatically with the established deacon board, lay elder board, or board of trustees. Much can be accomplished if a pastor sets the tone of walking in God's love despite a church's somewhat upside-down church government. The wise pastor will have to discern who the strongest voices and strongest personalities are in that church, spend a little extra time with those particular people, get them on your side, and include them in your ideas and let them take ownership of the ideas before they are shared with the whole church and implemented. The wise leader will suggest changes slowly but excitedly to his board and include them in the ownership of the idea and implementation. Give your board time to chew on your ideas. Share your ideas with your key people ONE-ON-ONE in person or over the phone and let them exchange with you, make suggestions, and help you. Let them see the possibilities of your idea. Let them feel what is in your heart. It's always best to share new ideas with people ONE-ON-ONE informally FIRST BEFORE discussing it in a group setting. It is statistical fact and historical record that people tend to see things and make decisions about issues in a group setting that they would never consider as an individual. But don't try to rearrange the established form of church government in a church where they "hired you." If you are a God-called leader, you can still lead even if it's unofficially. You will just have to do it slower and more informally. In any form of church government, whether scriptural or not so scriptural, people must be gently led, never pushed. Someone has said that people are like a piece of string. A string cannot be pushed, only pulled. People are not computers or buttons that push automatically with predictable results. So a wise leader can lead even in less than perfect conditions.

Later God may call you to another geographic region to found your own church from the ground up and then, and only then, can a pastor establish more scriptural precedents which will not doom a church's future to mediocrity and smallness. About the only other way a change could be made in an already established church is for two things to happen. A pastor would have to serve in that church for a minimum of 7-12 years (the time required to earn the people's trust and for a transition to occur in their hearts where they relate to that pastor as their "spiritual father", not just their present "minister"). Then Holy Spirit revival would have to sovereignly explode in that church with the majority of key members being filled with the Holy Spirit in similar fashion as the book of Acts.

Scriptural Basis For Elders & Deacons:

*Philippians 1:1 KJV - Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to **all the saints** in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons.***

In the above scripture, Paul speaks of three categories of Christians, three functional groups within the local church. Saints, Bishops and Deacons. (Hopefully the Bishops and Deacons are Saints too! Ha!)

To understand what a true Elder is, one must let the bulk of scripture interpret and balance itself. No one scripture verse by itself completely defines what an Elder really is. Obviously the choice of words that is used in the New Testament for this spiritual leader automatically gives us an initial word picture. The fact that "elder" is used in the New Testament interchangeably to denote a Christian leader and also in other contexts to denote an older person, shows us that a leader is someone with more influence via their experience, age, training, or anointing. But I propose that the scripture makes very clear what an Elder truly is.

Elder = Bishop = Pastor = Overseer = Spiritual Leader = Ephesians Chapter 4 Five-Fold Minister = Ordained Minister = Preacher/Teacher.

From all the scriptures I read, there is no such thing as a "LAY ELDER." An "ELDER" is undoubtedly a CALLED and SEPARATED Man or Woman of God, upon whom the anointing of God to FEED and LEAD rests. Carefully consider these scriptures:

*1 Peter 5:1 KJV - "The **elders** which are among you I exhort, **who am also an elder**, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; **Feed the flock** of God which is among you (NIV: **Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care**), **taking the oversight** thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the **Chief Shepherd** shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

*1 Timothy 3:1 KJV - "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an **overseer** (NIV and NLT: **elder, MSG: provide leadership in the church**), he desires a noble task." 1 Timothy 3:2 NLT - "For an **elder** must be a man whose life cannot be spoken against. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exhibit self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home and must be able to teach."*

*1 Timothy 2:1,2 AMP - "THE SAYING IS TRUE and irrefutable: If any man [eagerly] seeks the office of **bishop** (**superintendent, overseer**), he desires an excellent task (work). Now a **bishop** (**superintendent, overseer**) must give no grounds for accusation..."*

*Acts 14:23 KJV - "And when they had **ordained them elders in every church**, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."*

*1 Timothy 5:17 NIV - "The **elders who direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honour, especially those **whose work is preaching and teaching**."*

In the above verse, it does seem to allude to the fact that there are some elders whose work is NOT to preach and teach. This is about the only verse I can find that might justify one thinking that there is such a thing as a LAY ELDER. However, many elders' jobs in a local church may be more administrative or in counseling, so I lean towards thinking that this verse is referring to those leaders as opposed to a layman.

Now when I delineate between a LAYMAN and a CALLED MINISTER (commonly coined "clergy"), I am NOT drawing that difference as to whether they are in full time employed ministry as opposed to secular employment. Even Paul the Apostle was secularly engaged in his trade of tentmaking for periods of time while he was still in the ministry. Rather I am drawing the distinction between the two, not by employment status, but rather by THE CALL AND THE ANOINTING RESTING ON AN INDIVIDUAL THAT QUALIFIES THEM TO BE A LEADER AND FEEDER of God's people. A layman should NOT be in charge of governing a local church. A God-touched mouth is still the acid test of whether a person is called to the ministry. Of course, the scriptures also list character traits that either qualify or disqualify a person as well. But just because someone is a good leader in their secular profession DOES NOT qualify them to lead God's church. GOD HIMSELF decides whom to call and anoint to lead. To usurp and replace God's callings and giftings is a serious matter that can stunt the spiritual growth and direction of a local church at best, or cause God to withdraw His hand of blessing altogether, at worst.

*Acts 20:28 NIV - "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**. **Be shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with His own blood."*

Ephesians 4 lists five ministries that are commonly known as the FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, **PASTORS** and teachers. Below is a lexicon definition of the Greek Word translated "PASTOR."

"Pastor - 4166 poimhn poimen poy-mane'; TDNT-6:485,901; AV-shepherd 15, Shepherd 2, pastor 1; 18

1) a herdsman, esp. a shepherd

1a) in the parable, he to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow

2) metaph.

2a) the presiding officer, manager, director, of any assembly: so of Christ the Head of the church

2a1) of the overseers of the Christian assemblies

2a2) of kings and princes

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The tasks of a Near Eastern shepherd were:

- to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep - to defend the sheep from attackers - to heal the wounded and sick sheep - to find and save lost or trapped sheep - to love them, sharing their lives and so earning their trust.

During World War II, a shepherd was a pilot who guided another pilot whose plane was partially disabled back to the base or carrier by flying alongside him to maintain visual contact."

Pastoral Leaders (Elders) may be male OR FEMALE: Examples are Deborah who was the Judge of Israel (Leader), Esther a Queen, Anna The "Prophetess" of Luke 2:36, Priscilla a Co-Pastor with her husband of their church, found in 1 Corinthians 16:19. Modern Examples are Aimee Simple McPherson, Kathryn Kuhlman, Marilyn Hickey, Joyce Meyers, Elaine Hollmer, and many others. The Bible clearly states in Acts 2:38 that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, on His SERVANTS (men) and HANDMAIDENS (women) and that "THEY" (Both the men and the women) would prophesy (preach, teach and move in the gifts of the Spirit).

What is a Deacon?

Here is the Easton's Bible Dictionary expansion of the Deacon: "Anglicized form of the Greek word diaconos, meaning a "runner," "messenger," "servant." For a long period a feeling of mutual jealousy had existed between the "Hebrews," or Jews proper, who spoke the sacred language of palestine, and the "Hellenists," or Jews of the Grecian speech, who had adopted the Grecian language, and read the Septuagint version of the Bible instead of the Hebrew. This jealousy early appeared in the Christian community. It was alleged by the Hellenists that their widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of alms. This spirit must be checked. The apostles accordingly advised the disciples to look out for seven men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost, and men of practical wisdom, who should take entire charge of this distribution, leaving them free to devote themselves entirely to the spiritual functions of their office #Ac 6:1-6. This was accordingly done. Seven men were chosen, who appear from their names to have been Hellenists. The name "deacon" is nowhere applied to them in the New Testament; they are simply called "the seven" #Ac 21:8 Their office was at first secular, but it afterwards became also spiritual. Both Philip and Stephen, who were of "the seven," eventually preached and later became leaders; they did "the work of evangelists."

So we see that the word "Deacon" really means a "RUNNER", or a "SERVANT." Deacons are NOT then, called to GOVERN the local church, but rather to assist the pastoral staff (elders, or what is commonly called in the New Testament, a "presbytery") in carrying out the work of the Gospel. Deacons then, are NOT to be the decision makers in a local church, but rather key helpers, assistants, and department heads who carry out the vision of the senior pastor and pastoral staff. Deacons may obviously be decision makers in their respective areas of responsibility, but not the overall guides of the local church congregation. It is wrong for a lay "Deacon Board" to run a church; this is unscriptural. Likewise is it wrong for a similar arrangement called an "Administrative Board", to govern the local church.

Deacons may be male OR FEMALE:

Romans 16:1,3,12, Phil 4:2,3, 1 Timothy 3:11, 1 Timothy 5:9,10, Titus 2:3,4.

In these passages it is evident that females were then engaged in various Christian ministrations. The early church father, Pliny, makes mention of them also in his letter to Trajan (A.D. 110).