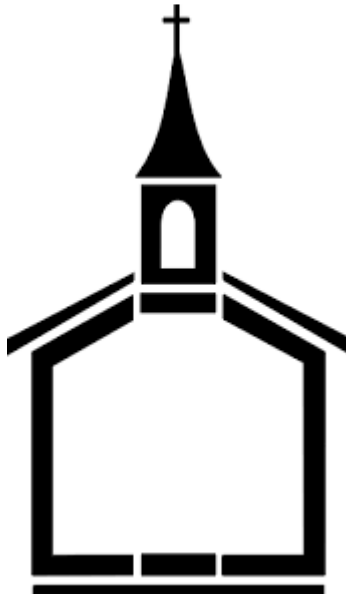


The establishment of...

Church Government

In the New Testament

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Restoration Movement Literature

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Colossians 2:10 ends with the phrase, “who is the Head over every power and authority.” It cannot be overstated that Christ is THE Head of the Church, His Kingdom. Everywhere else in Scripture relates this reality. Earlier in Colossians 1:18, Paul says the same. In Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus, he says the same in Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15, and 5:23. This has mass implications that are not commonly appreciated:

Many sects of Christianity attempt to have a Head other than Christ: a “Vicar” (the Pope, for one example), a Quorum (as the Mormon “Apostles”), a President (as in many denominations), or a Bishop (as in Presbyterianism, Anglicism, etc.). These other “heads” have no Scriptural authority, right, or assignment from God; they have “assumed” authority they do not possess by any divine right.

This has resulted in much division and confusion in churches today; outsiders look in and see a “corporate” structure instead of the polity Christ setup through His Apostles. We would do well to avoid any church that depends on a “head” other than Christ, as we do not have the right to “add or subtract” (Revelation 22:18+19) what we want from Scripture to make it fit our preferences or cultural norms. Christ Himself said that “all authority on heaven and earth” had been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). For any to assume His place is usurpation that will be denied, judged, and broken down.

Key Quote:
“These other “heads” (Popes, church councils, etc.) have no Scriptural authority, right, or assignment from God; they have “assumed” authority they do not possess by any divine right. “

Therefore, let us “start from the top” and work our way down: first, there is Christ, the Head. Then, there was His Apostles (John 17:20 – through “their word”).

As the Apostles established churches, they appointed elders (as seen in the progression of the early church in Acts 6:2, where there are only Apostles having authority, to Acts 14:23 and 15:2, where there were elders working with the Apostles in authority). Later, the Apostles told the evangelists to appoint elders in every town (Titus 1:5). From there, the elders acted as overseers of their local congregation (Acts 20:28, Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1+2, Titus 1:7). With no Apostles remaining, the elders remain as the human authority of each local church to this day.

The reader would do well to notice that there was always a plurality of elders in each of the above references. The only time “elder” (singular) is mentioned is in 3 John 1, where the Apostle John addresses Gaius, an elder in that local church. The letter of 3rd John is written to him about some of the people he serves within the church where he serves. Churches that only have one elder, or “pastor” as it is sometimes commonly called, go against New Testament teaching every time it is mentioned (the entire book of 3rd John was written to discourage this very kind of false church government).

Key Fact:
The book of 3 rd John was written to discourage only having one elder or “pastor”. There is always to be a plurality of elders, equal in authority.

“Voting” or “a church democracy” is a common cry from the pews. People want their voice to be heard! In America, especially, it is innate to assume we always have a right to vote on everything. This is untrue in

reality: many government organizations pass regulations and appoint positions without ever coming to the people. However, the illusion of “power from the people” is strong and this carries into how many churches conduct their internal governances.

Some will point to Acts 6 as a case of Christians “voting”, and use this as a proof-text that churches should still vote on things today. Is this is a legitimate position to take?

Let us look at Acts 6 in context: the church is brand new and growing quick; the church began in Acts 2, and more believers came into the church in Acts 4. By Acts 6, there are more than 5,000 believers. The only church office established at this point was “Apostle” (Acts 6:2).

Key Question:

Some will point to Acts 6 as a case of Christians “voting”; they then assert that therefore Christians should still vote today. Is this is a legitimate position to take?

The Apostles make the case that they should not neglect preaching for the sake of distributing food to the needy in the church (Acts 6:3a, 4) so they give the church the option of selecting seven men from among them to have this responsibility (Acts 6:3b).

The people did as the Apostles instructed (Acts 6:5). The Apostles approved their choices (Acts 6:6) and as a result of all the above, the Word of God spread (Acts 6:7).

At this point some will say, “It is clear that in Acts 6 that the people voted in their choice of deacons.”

The problems with the above assumption are the following:

1) The Greek word for “vote” (psephos) is not present in Acts 6, and in fact only appears in Acts 26:10 where Paul was testifying to the fact that he “cast his vote against them”, meaning, when he used to persecute the church! “Vote” only occurs in one other place in the New Testament, but it is translated “stone” there (Revelation 2:17), as “psephos” can mean either depending on the context.

2) Historically, Greeks voted (“democracy” was born of Greek culture), but the Jews (and most other ancient cultures) would “cast lots”.

See Leviticus 16:18, Joshua 18:6, 8, 10, Judges 20:9, 1 Chronicles 24:5, 24:31, 25:8, 26:13, 14, Nehemiah 10:34, 11:1, Job 6:27, Psalm 22:18, Proverbs 1:14, Ezekiel 21:21, Joel 3:3, Obadiah 1:11, Jonah 1:7, Nahum 3:10, Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:24, Acts 1:26. In the above texts, the Jews, Job (who predates the Jews and even Abraham) as a patriarch of the Old Testament), Babylonians, the nations of Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, Ninevites, Romans, and the Apostles all “cast lots” to decide certain things. Jews simply did not vote, nor did most other ancient cultures.

Key Fact:
Greeks voted, but Jews did not, and how Greeks voted is very different than how we understand “voting” today.

A Bible fact that is commonly unknown is the existence of the “Urim and Thummin” that the priests in the Old Testament would carry for the very purpose of ascertaining God’s will in a particular situation. They were two stones that were part of the priest’s breastplate (Exodus 28:30, Leviticus 8:8). They were cast lots specifically by the priests for the purpose of determining God’s will (Numbers 27:21, Deuteronomy 33:8).

Other examples include 1 Samuel 14:41, 1 Samuel 28:6, Ezra 2:63, and Nehemiah 7:65. Undeniably, this is an accepted, God-sanctioned method in the Old Testament, and naturally all of the above is where Peter gets the idea to decide the replacement for Judah (Acts 1:26). Since “the twelve” were considered restored after that point (Acts 2:14, 6:2), Matthias was rightly chosen.

As well, the Jews did not vote because the only “voting” in their cultural past was met with severe consequence. When Korah and his men (“community leaders” – Numbers 16:2) wanted control over the priesthood because they were more numerous (Numbers 16:3), it ended in their total destruction (Numbers 16:31-33). Needless to say, the Jews were not keen on voting, and never practiced as part of God’s Law. Instead, God’s Law has always dictated the kind of human government he expects over his earthly assemblies.

Key Fact:
Jews cast lots, by God’s instruction, multiple times in the Bible. Jews did not vote because it was not authorized by God and therefore every “vote” they ever did ended in disaster.

In Acts 6:2, the Apostles gathered all the disciples together. So, the method for “choosing” anything as a group would not have alienated either group since “this proposal pleased the whole group” (Acts 6:5a) and “they presented these men to the Apostles” (Acts 6:6a). Since some of the men chosen were Greek, some were Jews, and some were Greeks converted to Jews (Acts 6:5b), it is more likely each group got to pick their own help by the method of their own choosing.

However, Greek democracy and voting was not what we think of today. We think of voting as “each person gets a vote”. However, in

ancient culture, and even in American history, this was not the case. Only men, for one, were allowed to vote in Greek culture (and in America until August 18th, 1920), and only men with land (also true in American culture until the 1820's). Only citizen-Greeks of the accepted nationality were allowed to vote, just like only whites could vote in America until 1870. Therefore, to assume that any form of voting in Greek culture would have included “everybody” is not historically accurate. Even when Rome adopted Greek democracy, they turned it into a representative Republic, the form of government America actually has today.

Therefore, if there was a vote at all in Acts 6, it would have just been the Greek group, and only the Greek men with property would have been counted as having a vote. This is a far stretch from any “church vote” we see today! See chart below:

“Voting” in History			
Voting Right	Ancient Greece	Early America	Modern America
Gender	Only Men	Only Men before 1920	Both Genders as of 1920
Race	Only Greek Men	Only White Men before 1870	All Races as of 1870
Qualification	Only Property-Owning Greek Men	Only Property-Owning White Men before 1820	All People as of 1920

3) Acts 6 is a story, not a command in any form. We see the commands for forming church government later as the church has grown and spread, and the need for appointing local leadership develops. Once this happens, Paul through inspiration of God wrote the instructions for appointing elders, deacons to the evangelists he had trained in the field (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1). The below chart shows this progression:

Progression of Church Polity in the New Testament from the Beginning of the Church to Today					
When	Before the Church Began	When the Church Began	The fledgling church	Mid-life through the 1st century church	Late 1st century church and today
Position	Christ	Christ, Apostles	Christ, Apostles, Deacons	Christ, Apostles, Elders, Deacons	Christ, Apostles, Elders, Deacons
Scripture Reference	Matthew 28:18, Colossians 1:18	Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2-5	Acts 6	Acts 14, 15	Acts 14:23, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1
Occasion	Post Resurrection, before Ascension	Pentecost (Acts 2:1)	First Deacons chosen (Acts 6:2)	First elders appear (Acts 14:23, 15:2)	“Elders appointed in every town” as overseers (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5)
Appointed by whom at that time?	By the Father (Matthew 28:18)	By Christ	By the people by direction and approval of the Apostles (Acts 6:1-6)	By the Apostles (Acts 14:23)	First Elders and Deacons by the Evangelist (Titus 1:5, 1 Timothy 3:8); subsequent Elders and Deacons by the established Elders
Role	Head	Foundation (Ephesians 2:20)	Service (“Deacon” is the transliterated male form of the Greek word for “servant”)	Oversee with Apostles (Acts 15:2), Deacons assumed serving as before	Elders left as sole overseers of each local congregation as Apostles die off, Deacons assumed serving as before

Therefore, to view Acts 6 as a command (“we should vote”) would contradict the later divinely-inspired commands given by Paul to Timothy and Titus. Paul never mentions voting; instead, he instructs as to the “appointment” (Titus 1:5) of the first elders in every church in

every town. Once this was done, churches were administrated by the elders in each local congregation from there on out.

We can also see that the Apostles did not claim over-arching authority over the elders in each church by default at that point, as Peter himself becomes an elder in a church before assuming that authority (1 Peter 5:1). Why would Peter become an elder in a local church if His Apostleship already gave him that authority by default? Simple: because his Apostleship granted him authority to establish churches, pass on spiritual gifts, and teach the Word of God, but not govern a local church over the head of the elders present. Each congregation was autonomous, independent, and governed by nothing more than the Word of God, representing Christ the Head, and the local plurality of elders. There is no other God-instructed authority in a local church! Therefore, Peter became an elder (1 Peter 5:1) before acting as an authoritative representative of that local church.

This issue of church polity is oft-ignored when people “church shop”. As detestable as a practice as that is, it cannot be overstated that those looking for a church should indeed consider its government. If it is after Christ’s commands through His Apostles as exemplified in the New Testament, it is then common to find a healthy church there. When church polity is different than the New Testament command and example, an unhealthy church is either present or inevitable. One would be wise to fully inquire as to church government, its inherent leaders, and if they meet the New Testament qualifications. God does not provide us these numerous commands and examples so we can ignore them!

Ignorance and disobedience to church polity as described in Scripture is one of the most common culprits of the modern church failing today. If the Head of the local, independent church is not Christ, and His elders appointed by an evangelist are not in place, with deacons

serving, and volunteers contributing, chaos is both inherent and expected.

Key Quote:

“Ignorance and disobedience to church polity as described in Scripture is one of the most common culprits of the modern church failing today.”

One final point about Christ being the Head of His Kingdom, the Church, is that He most directly communicates His will through His Word. He has sent His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) to aid us, and His angels as ministering spirits among us (Hebrews 1:14), but we can learn the most about Christ’s church from reading and applying His Word. His Word gives us “complete (sufficient) understanding” of what we need to know to see to the local body administrated properly and what we are each to do for His Kingdom (Colossians 2:2-4, Romans 12:1+2).

In a future study, the specific roles of elders, deacons, and evangelists (ministers) will be discussed. The purpose of this study was to show the development of church government from its inception to its full development by the time Paul writes 1 Timothy and Titus. This helps “clears the air” regarding certain misunderstandings on how the New Testament church’s government was established, ancient understandings of decision making, selecting, and appointing leadership, and how this applies to the church today.