

Church Government

December 7, 2008_by Wilbur Reid, Dr.

New Testament churches were led by a plurality of Elders in the local churches

- Presbyteros (elder); Episkopos (overseer, bishop); used interchangeably in NT (Titus 1:5,7; Acts 20:17,28). They became separate positions in some churches later.
- Appointing Elders in each Church - Acts 14:23, Philippians 1:1
- Two views of ministers: evangelists under supervision of elders; ministers as elders

Distinguishing Features of Biblical Eldership

- Humble, servant character (Matthew 23:1-12)
- Shared oversight, Nonclerical structure
- Scriptural qualifications (I Timothy 3:2-7, Titus 1:5-10)
- Male leadership (more discussion in lesson on women's roles)
- Congregational submission (Hebrews 13:17, I Thessalonians 5:12,13)

Responsibilities of Elders

- Teach the Truth
 - Preaching and Teaching - I Timothy 5:17
 - Guard the Church from False Teachers - Acts 20:28-31
 - Including other Elders - I Timothy 5:19-22
 - Consider Doctrinal Issues - Acts 15:6-21
 - Examples to Congregation - I Peter 5:1-4
- Take Care of the Body
 - Shepherds of the Church - Acts 20:28,29,35
 - Pray for the Sick - James 5:13-15
- Lead and "Oversee" the Congregation

Deacons

- Diakonos - "the servants" or "the helpers" (used 30 times in the New Testament)
- Deacons as church ministry are only mentioned in Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8-12, both times with Elders.
- "The Seven", a precursor and model for deacons - Acts 6:1-6

The example of the New Testament Churches

- No clerical or priestly hierarchy (I Corinthians 12)
 - priesthood of all believers - indwelling of the Holy Spirit (I Peter 2:5-9)
 - all believers have the privilege of ministry
 - the body of Christ works together like the parts of the human body
- No official titles
 - All Christians are saints and priests, some are apostles, elders, deacons, pastors, etc - but these are only descriptions and never used as formal titles in the New Testament (i.e.: Saint John, Elder Paul, Pastor James, etc.).
- No hierarchy above the local congregation.

Recommended source for additional study: "Biblical Eldership, an Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership", by Alexander Strauch

Qualifications for Elders/Overseers and Deacons

	ELDER <i>I Timothy 3:2-7</i>	ELDER <i>Titus 1:6-9</i>	DEACON <i>I Timothy 3:8-10</i>
Faith			
Able to teach	X	X	
Holds to the truth		X	X
Not a recent convert	X		
Personal Characteristics			
Above reproach (blameless)	X	X	X
Upright, holy		X	
Temperate	X	X	X
Self-controlled	X	X	
Not violent, but gentle	X	X	
Respectable	X		X
Not quarrelsome	X		
Not a lover of money	X		
Has a good reputation with outsiders	X		
Not overbearing		X	
Not quick tempered		X	
Loves what is good		X	
Sincere			X
Tested			X
Personal behavior			
Disciplined		X	
Does not pursue dishonest gain		X	X
Not given to drunkenness	X	X	X
Hospitable	X	X	
Family			
Husband of one wife	X	X	X
Manages his own family well	X		X
Sees that his children obey him	X	X	X

American Churches

Senators = Elders

Representatives = Deacons

President = Preacher

Democracy = congregational votes on issues (budget, elders, calling preacher, etc)

Roman Government used as template for Roman Catholic Church

Caesar renamed: **Pope**

Roman Senators renamed: **Cardinals**

Roman Governors renamed: **Archbishops**

Roman Senator with no territory: **Bishop**

(Large) Roman Province renamed: **Archdiocese**

(Small) Roman Territory renamed: **Diocese**

Imperial Chair of Jupiter where Caesar sat renamed: **Throne of St. Peter**

Vestal Virgins renamed: **Nuns**

Praying to a dead human god renamed: **Praying to a saint**

Many more parallels...

Women's Role in the Church

December 14, 2008

Disclaimer - this is a controversial topic that well-intentioned scholars can't agree on. Don't forget: In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things love. This is a non-essential - it is OK if we don't all agree - our salvation is not in jeopardy over this issue. This lesson will lean toward a non-traditional viewpoint to stimulate thinking.

Understanding the cultural situation of women in the 1st century, and determining which instructions applied to a specific culture and which are for all time.

Definitions:

- Prophecy - proclaiming the word of God; preaching (not necessarily foretelling future events)
- Teaching - Colossians 3:16 - teach each other... with hymns, songs, and spiritual songs. Paul's definition of teaching was broad.
- "Aner" and "Gune" - Greek for "man" and "woman", or (usually) "husband" and "wife"
- Relationship between husbands and wives - husband is the head of the household, but loves and serves his wife as Christ loved the church and died for her. Ephesians 5:23-28

Salvation and Spiritual Gifts

- Throughout the New Testament it is clear that gender plays no role in salvation or receiving spiritual gifts.
 - Galatians 3:28 - There is neither... male nor female, all are one in Christ
 - I Corinthians 12:7-11 - Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good...
 - Ephesians 4:11-13 - gifts to prepare God's people...

There are 3 verses that place some restrictions on New Testament women:

- I Timothy 2:8-14 - women should learn in quietness... and not teach or have authority over men
 - Context - immediately precedes requirements for Elders and Deacons
 - Priority of man in creation and the first sin is noted

- Gnostic teaching - mother-goddess
 - If this command is taken literally for today's church, where is the line drawn?
- I Corinthians 11:2-16 - women should have heads covered when praying or prophecying in the worship service, but don't miss the subtlety: women were praying and preaching in the worship service
- I Corinthians 14:33b-35 - women should remain silent in the churches, it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church
 - Context - Orderly worship services

Deacons - I Timothy 3:11-13 - is it "wives" or "women"? There are no qualifications for elder's wives.

Elders - are considered by most Christians to be men, due to requirements (I Timothy 3) and as role of the head of the house.

Specific examples of women in ministry:

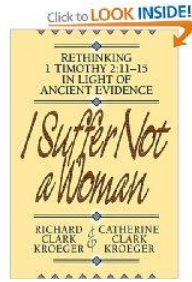
- Priscilla (and Aquilla and Apollos) - Acts 18:24-28 - Priscilla taught Apollos
- Philip's 4 daughters prophecied (preached) - Acts 21:8,9
- Phoebe is referred to as a deaconess - Romans 16:1

Christian Churches generally have:

- very few ladies that are preaching ministers, but often have female music, youth, or children's ministers
- few ladies that teach men in adult Sunday School classes
- few "deaconesses", but have many ladies that serve the positions - often under a different title, such as "ministry team leader" or "servant leader"
- no female Elders
- moderate to good female participation in leading portions of the worship service
- Female leadership within Christian Churches, colleges, mission fields is growing.

Conclusions

- The key to biblical ministry is a humble, servant's heart.
- Although only men of the New Testament time were educated, it is clear that women were very active in the ministry of the church (including teaching, preaching, and praying in the worship service).
- It is difficult to determine if Paul's restrictions for women were based on local problems that he was addressing, or if they were principles for all times and cultures.
- The Elders have responsibility for the oversight of the congregation. We should defer to our Elders on any controversies, and allow liberty for brothers and sisters that don't come to the same conclusions that you do.



Additional Resources...

I Suffer Not a Woman, Kroeger and Kroeger

I Permit Not a Woman... To Remain Shackled: <http://www.freedomring.org/permit/>