

Body Life - #1

Marks of a Well-Ordered Church

Introduction – God continues to bless our fellowship with many new people, coming from a variety of church backgrounds, with a variety of assumptions about what a church ought to be and do. While many answers to how EEF distinctly answers these questions can be found in our constitution, it is good for us together to regularly examine the scriptures and let the Word of God instruct us as to why and how we exist. Our goal is not to simply remind or refresh ourselves, but to exhort us in the promises and commands of the Lord with regard to His body, the church.

Where's the Head? (Col 1:15-18) – Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, the image of the invisible God, is the head of the church. He is the head of the church eschatologically, in her final, purified form. But He is also the head of the church historically, with all her warts and blemishes. He is the head of the church universal, and He is the head of this church, EEF. There is no substitute for Christ here on earth. The Pope is not the head of the church, nor the Queen of England, nor a protestant 'senior' pastor.

"firstborn over all creation" – Christ is not firstborn in the sense of being created. He holds the office of firstborn, having inheritance rights over everything. And this is because He created all things (v 16, see also John 1:3).

"head of the body, the church..." – While Christ already has rights over everything, He has a particular rule over the church as a head does over a body. We are not only His by creation rights, but by rights of redemption and covenant. These rights are supreme.

Authority Given, Men Sent (Matt 28:16-20) – That's not to say that authority is not delegated from the Head. As Christ prepared to ascend to His throne, He charged His apostles by this preeminent authority to build His church by discipling the nations. These apostles joined with the previous prophets in laying the foundation for the church (Eph 2:9-22). Their particular authority was authenticated by signs and wonders (2 Cor 2:12), and this authority included the ability to speak the very words of God. A well-ordered church, then, submits to Christ only, as its supreme authority, and to the teaching of Scriptures written by God's prophets and apostles as Christ's Word.

Appointments for the Church – It is interesting to note that the apostles never took it upon themselves to appoint other men as apostles (the one exception being to replace Judas in Acts 1). Paul, for instance, takes Timothy to serve with him, and yet Timothy is not made an apostle (Col 1:1). As churches are formed, elders are appointed, an office of ministry that would be perpetuated (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5)

Plurality of Leaders – When elders are serving in a church in the New Testament, you always see a plurality of leaders (another example – Acts 20:17). These leaders may be called elders (*presbuteros*), bishops or overseers (*episkopos*), and ones who shepherd or pastor (*poimen*). These terms are used interchangeably and do not distinguish any sort of hierarchy, although they do help describe their function.

This also points out the fact that elders serve together in session. There is not a 'senior pastor' who reports to his board of directors. They are all pastors, bishops, overseers, elders.

Overseers are Undershepherds (1 Pet 5:1-4) – The office of elder is not to be sought or held as a titular or honorific title. This is a position of shepherding, of serving, of protecting, of teaching, and of being an example. There are doctrinal and character qualifications for all of the elders, not only those who serve vocationally. And then, having qualified, the elder has an organic relationship to the church members in a similar manner to the organic relationship of Christ to His body.

The Relationship of Members to Elders (Heb 13:7, 17) – They must know you, and you must know them. You must look to your elders to be examples whose lives you follow. They must know you and give an account for you by name. Therefore, just as there must be a known list of elders, there should be a known list of members. You are to be connected.

The Relationship of the Church Particular to the Church General (Eph 4:1-6) – We cannot think of ourselves as autonomous, independent people. Also, we cannot think of our church as a disconnected, autonomous, independent gathering. The word 'church' in the singular can be used of many gatherings (as in Acts 8:1). Our association into the CRE is not to form another denomination as much as it is to eliminate 11 one-church denominations. There, elders gather to guard one another in the doctrines of the local churches, while striving together for greater unity of faith and praying for reformation in our land.

The Purpose of it All (Eph 4:11-16) – This has all been established by our Head so that we might grow up into our Head; so that we might be conformed to Christ. Our worship, our evangelism, our discipleship, our manner of loving one another, has been given to us under the authority of the church, not a fragmented system of para-church ministries, programs and rallies. The church has neglected her duties, despised her offices, and muddled her message. But when God grants true reformation, it will come through the church.

Dave Hatcher – May 6, 2001