

WAS THERE A PYRAMID STRUCTURE OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

“The only thing more dangerous than ignorance is arrogance.”

~Albert Einstein

Friends, can you see the incredible arrogance of a person or persons proclaiming a hierarchical pyramid of church government, and then, appointing themselves as the “top man” (or one of the top men) in power within that structure? God’s Word reveals that such is a false system, based on misunderstanding and then misapplying scriptures to deceive people and maintain control. What this author says is NOT of importance. What God says IS! Can you accept God’s direct written words to you when they diverge from what you have been taught for years, and may have come to fully believe? Are you more comfortable accepting and following what you may have been taught, or are you committed to living by what the Bible actually says, when the two diverge? Many cannot learn because it is outside of their “comfort zone,” or because they feel intimidated. When they see a false teaching or abuse, there is often silence. Silence then is often interpreted as acquiescence, further empowering the abusers of their trust. Many people have willingly enslaved themselves to a false church government system to their own hurt – sometimes because of intimidation, sometimes out of a desire not to further inflame a bad situation, and sometimes because they misunderstand what God’s Word really says about church structure and governance. But God will always protect those who humbly pursue His truth (Ps.91:4).

Can we realize that God knows what kind of government He wants in His Church – and understand that He has revealed it CLEARLY in His Word? God did not intend for us to use carnal human reasoning to try to figure it out for ourselves! And **He certainly did not leave it to us to copy the Vatican!**

How were the church leaders in the New Testament chosen? Were they appointed by those “from the top down” like in a hierarchical pyramid structure of government, or was it more horizontal, like that set up by Moses?

Acts 6:2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables."

3 *"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;*

4 *"but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

5 *And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,*

6 *whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.*

In the spirit of God's Statutes, as Deut.1 instructs us, it was the people in the church who put forth Stephen and Philip and the others to be ordained to serve the local churches. Then, the apostles checked to confirm their qualifications Biblically. As long as those put forth met the Biblical qualifications of the office in which they were to minister (Deut.1:13 & 1st Timothy 3), they were ordained by the ministry through the laying on of hands. Here is the same principle, or spirit of the Statutes being taught in New Testament times. How many local churches have been frustrated and deeply disappointed when the minister has ordained or appointed someone who was not respected by the congregation – to the hurt of the church? How many have been appointed from the "top down" out of ignorance or to "reward" a friend or someone? God's Word says the church would put forth their deacons. Unless there was a Biblical reason to refuse, the pastor or church leader would appoint the one the people chose! It was simple, smart, Biblical and organized. Philip (and possibly Stephen) not only served as a deacon, but also later became an evangelist and preached mightily from God's Word.

We see NO PYRAMID STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT – in fact, we see just the opposite! The church was very COLLEGIAL in its governance, and not at all pyramidal. Again, it was more horizontal in nature – **there clearly were leaders, but that leadership was not pyramidal, it was not of a military style, and it was not patterned after Rome!**

Indeed Paul was so concerned that he not appear to be lording it over the churches, or seem to be after their money, that he had them put into writing whom THEY chose to carry the financial gift for the needy brethren in Jerusalem.

1 Cor 16:3 *And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.*

2 Cor 8:18 *And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches;*

19 *And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind:*

20 *Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: (KJV)*

With God's form of church governance, the people were truly actively involved, and did not feel like the only thing they could do was "obey, pay and pray." They were an *active* part of the service of the church and of the support of the Gospel.

What about when Paul "sent" Timothy or others to serve the churches? Was that not a type of pyramid structure of hierarchy? Many use those verses to show the authority of the ministry. Clearly there was authority and respect among the people for the apostles, evangelists, pastors and elders. The people were cooperative and collegial. Orders were not often necessary. No minister ever had the right to exercise power over the personal private lives of the membership. Their authority was limited to the teaching and application of the Statutes and Precepts of God through His Word, and was for the service of the church. It was not controlling.

There were even times when the apostles would seek to have someone do something, and the person would say "No." Those who quote: "Paul sent Timothy" in order to demonstrate Paul's use of authority, do they also quote when Paul tried to send Apollos, but Apollos in effect said "No, it's not convenient now" (1 Cor.16:12)? Those who quote that Paul "sent" Titus, do they also point out that Barnabas and Mark refused to do what Paul asked (Acts 15:36-40)? Do we find Paul submitting to Peter, or Peter to Paul? No...why not?

Clearly there was leadership and the people had a healthy respect for true ministers, but that **respect was first earned**. Further, there was no pyramid structure of hierarchy, and no ordering, commanding or firing of ministers for not yielding to the will of the one with the "**power of the purse**" – as is commonly done today.