

2

Protestant Pastoral System: FALSE FOUNDATION

In our search for an active body life, we must follow the biblical church government. Most wouldn't tend to think the church government really mattered in the issue of church life, but it bears upon it greatly.

Before we actively look into this, consider a timely lesson from the Old Testament. Before Israel had any king, God raised up judges to rule at different times. The time came when the people wanted a "kingdom" like the rest of the world. They cried for a king. They got their "kingdom" (1 Samuel Ch. 12). As long as the king followed the Lord, all was well. When he departed, the whole nation suffered without even getting a chance for actual involvement.

There was an instance when King David decided to number Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1-17). He had some kind of evil motives, for which God's wrath fell. David repented, but he had to choose one of three judgements from God. He chose the pestilence, and many thousands who never even knew why, died. Even David

mourned the prayer:

17 And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have thy done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

1 Chronicles 21:17

The question of the day, “Why did they suffer without having a real chance to speak on their own behalf?” The answer, “They chose to have a king represent them in opposition to God’s arranged governmental structure.” With that single chosen replacement for them, they also suffered the consequences of that single representative’s failure. God allowed them to have the system they wanted, but the risks were greatly increased.

This brings us up to a look at the popular “little kingdom” system that’s been adopted in the churches of America today. Enter, “The Pastor”.

Pastor/Congregation System

In typical Protestant churches, we find the “Pastor” and the “Congregation” arrangement. This isn’t biblical, and it does make a difference. With such a system, the body life Christ desires is seriously handicapped, if not completely halted. We’ll examine the biblical pattern necessary for true body life to function, and why it’s so necessary, but first we need to examine foundational misunderstandings that have been at the perpetuation of the “Pastor/Congregation” or “Pastor/Elders/Congregation” system.

There are numerous complications of this popular system we’ll look at. Before we’re ready for that, though, we need to look at some important obstacles to our understanding that may at first seem tedious. Until we clear up some preconceived ideas, we’re constantly in danger of reading into passages meanings that aren’t there.

Dealing With False Foundations

I will start off with the pastoral epistles of First and Second Timothy and Titus. Do they, in some form, justify a “Chief Pastor” who’s the authority over a multiple eldership? Let’s take a look:

1 TIMOTHY

In 1 Timothy we see Paul’s greeting to a junior fellow worker in his apostolic ministry.

3 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, *1 Timothy 1:3*

This shows us a perspective, tied in with Acts 20:1-5:

1 And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. 2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece. 3 And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. 4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.

Acts 20:1-5

Paul was fulfilling his missionary (apostolic) work with the assistance of several workers, of whom Timothy (Timotheus) was one. Timothy was temporarily left to finish getting the church in Ephesus established on the right foundation.

In Acts 19:8-10 we see Paul’s establishing a church in Ephesus, which work took two years and three months. After this period of time, Paul wanted to do some missionary work in Macedonia. He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to do some initial work (Acts 19:21-22). While they were gone, the “goddess Diana” uproar occurred (Acts 19:23-41). Timothy obviously returned to Ephesus about the time of Acts 20:1. Paul went on ahead to Macedonia and had Timothy complete the foundation-

al work in Ephesus, referred to in 1 Timothy 1:3. So far, we're looking at a missionary work of church planting, which took no more than about 3 years.

Tradition also ascribed 1 Timothy 1:3 to a time much later, that occurred sometime after the final accounts in Acts. I find some serious difficulties with that position. Either way, the placement of Timothy in Ephesus in this verse is an occurrence of regular missionary activity, not because Timothy was the Ephesian "Chief Pastor".

What follows from 1:4 on, is an outline of fulfilling the charge of 1:3. Chapter 3:1-13 outlines specifics for Timothy in the kind of men to appoint to oversee the affairs of the local church.

14 These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: 15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

Paul's words of 3:14-15 indicate Paul's sojourn was intended to be short, while Timothy set up the finishing touches on a missionary enterprise. In the event Paul was delayed, he wanted to be sure Timothy got it off to a good start with the contents of this epistle. Even if it was a prolonged delay, Paul wasn't foreseeing setting Timothy up as a sole "lord" year in, and year out. Going to Acts 20:4, we see Paul's delay wasn't long, and when he finished that sojourn, Timothy left Ephesus to meet Paul at Troas.

1 Timothy 4:1 continues with directions in which to see this fledgling church established, with appropriate warnings.

We see the constant view of Timothy's set-up work in verses like 4:6, "...put the brethren in remembrance..." and 4:11,12 "*These things command and teach...*" with the constant view of this being a temporary thing looking to the "*Till I come...*" of Paul in 4:13.

An important detail to notice, in view of the Protestant Pastoral System, is Paul's commission to Timothy:

*17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.
18 For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The laborer is worthy of his reward.*
1 Timothy 5:17,18

In the popular “Pastoral System”, the pastor is a hired professional who governs as a near final authority. Since some say Timothy was the “Pastor” of the Ephesian church, isn’t it interesting to note this supposed “Protestant-Styled Pastor” is giving instruction to the Ephesian fellowship, in setting up their elder-ship board, of paying “another” teaching elder? If Timothy was the full-time “Pastor”, the note of 5:17 would have been a reflexive instruction for Timothy, meaning personal profit. It would have been inconsistent with the whole tenor of the epistle, and it would have been inconsistent with Paul’s personal policy (as found in 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; 12:17,18) of not doing anything that would carry the impression Paul, or his workers, were seeking monetary advantage from their converts.

2 TIMOTHY

2 Timothy 1:8 has Paul saying, “...*nor of me his prisoner*” hinting of Paul’s imprisonment at the time he wrote this. 1:17 indicates Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. 1:18 recalls back to the time when they were all working back in Ephesus. Timothy was a freeman still, so was continuing the apostolic work. The apostle Paul was ministering in the capacity imprisonment allowed him of exhorting other workers and churches.

2:2 outlines the position Timothy held as an establisher of new churches. This refers to Timothy’s apostolic assistance work, not “Chief Pastor” of a grounded assembly. 2:14 continues this tone.

Due to the money issue raised back in 1 Timothy, an important note must be made here of 2:6:

6 The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits.
2 Timothy 2:6

We find this verse in the middle of a dissertation on faithful-

ness to duty before the reward. In this context, verse 6 is Paul's expression that a farmer doesn't get the blessing of the crop until after the work has been done and the fruit's ready to harvest. You don't get the eternal reward until after the work has been done. This isn't referring to a "Chief Pastor" getting the cream of a salary, as some might suppose. The context of verses 2:3-7 make this clear.

We have the rather well known passage on faithfulness in preaching found in 4:2,3. Is this the preaching of a "Chief Pastor" of some kind? The apostolic context certainly doesn't necessitate any such implication. A church planter, who is a missionary or apostle (by the way, both words mean the same thing from different languages) is fulfilling 4:2,3 in faithfully executing his duties. In fact, jump ahead to 4:5, "*...do the work of an evangelist*." This flows through to a demonstration of Timothy's "mobility", as it were, in his particular calling. 4:9 shows the mobility of Timothy's office, which a "Chief Pastor" wouldn't tend to have. Timothy's work wasn't "local", it was "missionary". 4:21 also shows such a journey would consume a long sojourn, indicating the temporary nature of the business Timothy was conducting in different churches.

4:11 shows Timothy is still actively part of Paul's missionary band.

4:12 has an important textual instruction. You see, in some Bibles at the end of 2 Timothy, is a small insert which states, "The second epistle unto Timotheus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Ephesians, was written from Rome, when Paul was brought before Nero the second time." This contradicts numerous details. It's not a part of the scripture. It was an added "note" based on tradition. Now the tradition of the "Chief Pastor" system started very early in the New Testament church. Besides violating the office of apostolic assistance, which Timothy was invested with, he couldn't have fulfilled the "bishop", or "elder", responsibilities while continuing along with Paul's work. Looking back to 4:12, we see Paul's note of having sent Tychicus to Ephesus wouldn't make sense. If Timothy was in Ephesus,

he would have known this, for in those days the mail (this second letter to Timothy) traveled no faster than the person would have. In fact, if Timothy was in Ephesus, Paul would most likely have sent the letter with Tychicus. The following verse (4:13) indicates where Timothy was. He was at Troas where he could fulfill the request that verse makes.

Considering the tradition that Timothy served as a bishop in Ephesus, this could be factual. Later in life, he may have settled down from missionary activities, to live in Ephesus. At that time, he could easily have taken the office of “elder” in a local church.

Apart from the “added” note at the end of 2 Timothy, nothing in this epistle enforces a “Chief Pastor” position ever existed in a local church.

TITUS

Titus is the third of the three pastoral epistles. We need to look again to see if this epistle lays any solid foundation for a “Chief Pastor” office.

In 1:5 we find the setting:

5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: *Titus 1:5*

This gives a lot of insight into what’s going on. **More missionary church planting work.**

Titus was a fellow worker with Paul in his apostolic work. He was finishing up Paul’s foundational work in numerous local churches, that were decided by city location. Titus’ work matched that of Timothy. He wasn’t a “Chief Pastor” in any sense of the modern conception.

From this verse, we see the tone that lays the position of an “elder” being a local church office, not broader, such as a district church association or missionary office.

In 2:3 we find the same kind of authoritative stand that Timothy was encouraged in, laying a firm foundation of godly living and faith. This is the fulfilling of apostolic work.

Finishing up, 3:12 shows how Titus was a temporary feature in the local churches. He, like we saw of Timothy, was to depart shortly after the foundational work was completed.

There is another false traditional postscript at the end of Titus in some Bibles, showing the false “Chief Pastor” assumption. It reads, “*It was written to Titus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Cretians, from Nicapolis of Macedonia.*” This whole postscript is wrong, when you consider 1:5. The office of an “elder” or “bishop” (two words for the same position), is a local church office. There was no such thing as a “*Church of the Cretians*” for Crete was an island with many churches. There were city churches, but there is no biblical concept of a country-wide church. That’s teaching that comes out of the “Chief Pastor” theory. Look at 1:4 and you’ll notice Titus isn’t addressed as a bishop.

REVELATION

The book of Revelation also has a section that has some serious false assumptions read in all too often.

We never find any example of a “Chief Pastor” for a New Testament church. The only portion of scripture that bears any resemblance is found in the seven letters to the churches in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. This section doesn’t give any teaching regarding church structure. It’s a collection of seven letters put into the midst of some rather obscure imagery, such as in 3:1 where we find “*the seven Spirits of God, ...*”.

These letters are addressed to “*messengers*” or “*angels*,” in the KJV. These messengers were to deliver the messages of the letters to each respective church. The messenger of each church is in the singular, for it would only take one messenger to deliver the letter. We tend to put into our mental picture here, a “Chief Pastor” of a church, because that’s what we see around us. In actuality, we might better see a mental picture more accurately if we slipped in some other name here. Revelation is written by John and he was imprisoned, so couldn’t personally deliver the letters. He obviously had assistants like Paul had his Timothy’s

and Titus's. Slipping in "Paul" for "John", we could picture Paul, bound in prison, sending a Timothy with the letter to Sardis and a Titus, with the letter to Philadelphia, and so forth (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25). Timothy and Titus would each be "a messenger for the church of Sardis" and "of Philadelphia". This is in perfect keeping with the way the apostles worked, of whom John was one, and naturally fits the wording of these two chapters.

Apostolic Special Event

When we think of church, we tend to imagine a group of people, "the congregation" who sit in pews to hear "the preacher". In fact, without this regularly occurring, many have a hard time imagining church as "being held". Is this biblical? The Bible outlines a number of different gatherings the early church had. The only gathering that fits the contemporary concept of "church" was a special occasion apostolic preaching described in Acts 20:7-12. In actuality, it was a communion gathering. The apostle Paul was passing through and, when in fellowship, took the opportunity to "preach a sermon". This was not the "standard" of the church service. It was a special event.

We need to realize this isn't the normal "church service", for unless we do, we cannot help but fall back into the perception of the "Pastor/Congregation" mindset. The standard "church service" will be looked at in more depth a little later.

Having covered the foundation of the "Pastoral" thinking being read into scripture, we're ready to take a look at the inevitable hazards.