

## God Has Spoken

(Hebrews 1:1-5)

Have you visited with different churches? Have you felt a little out of place because of titles used for people in the organizational structure of the church? It can be especially confusing when people use terms you know (deacon, elder, *etc.*), but mean something unfamiliar. One church is ruled by a pastor, another by the deacons, and still another by a governing board. Is it important?

It surprises many to learn that God has prescribed the organization of the church which Jesus built (Matthew 16:18). His church in each location is organized under a plurality (Titus 1:5) of elders, never just one. These men (I Timothy 3:1,5; never women, 2:12) rule the church (I Timothy 5:17) according to the word of God (Titus 1:9), and must give an account for every soul under their charge (Hebrews 13:17). They are also called *bishops* (Philippians 1:1) because they oversee the local church (Acts 20:28), and *pastors* (Ephesians 4:11) because they are responsible for the spiritual nurturing of the church. Each must meet specific qualifications (I Timothy 3:1-6; Titus 1:6-9) and fulfill specific duties (I Peter 5:1-3). All members of the church serve under the elders, including deacons (I Timothy 3:8-13), preachers (II Timothy 1:11) and teachers (Acts 13:1).

God has prescribed the organization of the church. Some still deny that it's important. Don't be one of them. Respect God's word.

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"But that was 2,000 years ago." Possibly you've heard someone say something like this in response to a particular passage you have read in the Bible. It is a common belief that the New Testament is only a record of how early churches responded to Christ, and that today we have to figure out how to apply His principles to our age.

It's common, but it's a mistake. Take the Old Testament as an example. The first words of it were written about 1,500 years - and the last about 400 years - before Christ. For the most part, it is a record of the Law given to Israel at Mt. Sinai, and of their history under the authority of that Law. By the time Jesus came to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17), and take it out of the way (Colossians 2:14), that record had become an ancient document, from hundreds to over a thousand years old. Yet, of the Old Testament Paul wrote, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (I Corinthians 10:11). Israel was rebuked for not obeying it exactly as it was written (Mark 11:15-17; Matthew 5:18-19).

The New Testament also, was written for later generations. It is a living word (Hebrews 4:12). It is profitable for all we need (II Timothy 3:16-17). It is a pattern to be held fast (II Timothy 1:13) and kept until Jesus comes again (I Timothy 6:14). Its change is forbidden (Galatians 1:6-8). It is the law (Romans 8:2; Galatians 6:2)!

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Last week we made reference to II Timothy 3:16-17, which says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." Doctrine is what we are to teach and learn, reproof shows any deviation in our belief and practice from that standard, correction leads us back into the way we should be going, and instruction in righteousness is the plan we must follow to stay back on that right path. The Bible is all we need for all of this - all we need to be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The early Christians were taught the value of knowing the Bible: "The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Maybe that's why some people don't read it: the Bible knows them better than they want to be known. Mark Twain said, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't know that cause me trouble; it's those parts of the Bible I do know and don't do that cause me the trouble." Understanding the Bible isn't the problem. Willingness and discipline to obey what we read - that's often a different matter. Do you have that willingness and self-discipline?

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The Bible is "profitable" (II Timothy 3:16) because it is "given by inspiration of God" (a translation of a Greek word which literally means "God-breathed"). This the Bible claims over 2,000 times (see, for example, II Samuel 23:2; Jeremiah 1:4-9; I Corinthians 2:11-13). If the word is God's, then it is surely both profitable and authoritative.

Many preachers claim authority and inspiration for the words they speak. Can we believe them? After all, in the past God spoke through prophets; why not now?

It's easy to claim inspiration, and it's tempting to claim authority. In laying down the law at home, Mother says, "Because I said so," and that's good enough for the children because they have seen her love and care, and her power to enforce her rules.

God, too, verified the source and authority of His word. He did so by means of miracles (Hebrews 2:1-4). Where is the verification of the conflicting words of many today? God says that anything preached that differs from His Book brings a curse upon the preacher (Galatians 1:8-9). Charlatans and hucksters claim to heal illnesses and injuries, but Jesus walked on the water, raised the dead, arose from the grave Himself and ascended into the clouds! When their work was done, the confirming miracles ended (John 20:30-31; I Corinthians 13:8-9).

Man's claims are empty. God's word will judge us.

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