

Character in Church Government

Function versus Title, the Dichotomy of Leadership

Peter J. Scott, transcribed 2018

Today is a special day because we are going to be laying hands on Dan Wilbur to be officially instated as a deacon in the church. Before that happens I want to give you a summary and remind you of what God has done for us when He put together the Body of Christ. It is interesting to me when we talk about church government that we often just don't understand. I was reading where in one book it was stated that Jesus was reluctant to talk about church government and reticent to give His approval or criticism.

Actually that is not the case. Jesus wasn't reluctant to talk about church government. Do we know why? He *was* the church government! It is really interesting to note that He didn't set apart a particular church, particular temple, particular kibbutz and say, "This is the way you should build. This is the way it is to be done." He didn't do that. He could have but we have to remember where He was ministering from and in, an environment where there were all those things, temple, kibbutzes and levitical priests, etc. He was very comfortable with the small Jewish communities that He was responding and ministering to. Remember when He came out of the desert after being tempted by the enemy, the devil, it says that He went in and began to "*give sight to the blind and give release the captives*" (Luke 4:18) quoting from Isaiah. It says that He read from the Word as "was His custom." So we see there was your paradigm; there was your pattern that He was completely familiar with. In those particular Jewish communities there was no one person in charge, rather a group of men, a group of elders just like we have here. So He did not say, "*We have got to do it differently now.*"

He actually says the opposite, "*Do it like it has already been doing.*" However, remember what He said to Peter, "*Who do you think I am?*" He responded, "*Well, You are the Christ, the Son of God, the Chosen One.*" Later on he said, "*Where else could we go?*" Jesus said clearly, "*Upon this rock I will build my church.*" What rock? Peter? No. The Rock of the understanding that Jesus is the Christ, no man can stand in His place. Written on the front of the hat that the Pope wears it says, "*Ruling in the place of Christ*"! How rude! I don't want to get too critical but where do they get that idea?! It is certainly *not* in the bible, because it is the revelation of Christ in us that is going to establish the church not a person.

If it was a person, we would be in great trouble as we see that Apostle Peter denied the Lord three times. If it was a person we would be doomed. But it is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Amen. The character of Christ in you that is the beginning of church government. *“Upon that Rock I will build My church.”*

Vision, Missions and Traditions

Levitical Priesthood vs. A Kingdom of Kings and Priests

Now, there was another thing going on at the time when Jesus was roaming the earth in human form; there was a levitical priesthood. There were Levis. Jesus came to abolish that. It is clear that form of church government was not what He wanted. He actually tore and rent, ripped open the veil to the Holy of Holies, saying *“No more will the levitical priests be between you and Me. In fact you are a kingdom of priests, a kingdom of kings and priests. You are the church, the levitical priesthood. You don’t have to go there any more.”* Wow, I guess we do know what we are doing by not building around a man, a single person, pastor, teacher, a anointed man of God, or an idea, etc. Rather we are building around the revelation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Upon Him the Lord our Father was pleased to lay the iniquities of us all.

When a man is ordained to be an elder or deacon involving the laying on of hands, part of who that man is identified as being, we need to keep in mind that Jesus said, *“Let no one be called teacher or rabbi; let no one be called pastor.”* You see these are **functional** gifts that we have. The Holy Spirit comes and gives them to us, the church, for the working out of the kingdom of God in our midst, to bring forth His kingdom here on this earth. It is not for building up a ministry. It is not for building up a man or any church building, or particular group of believers. It is to build up the Kingdom of God in our midst. Amen.

When we are “ordained” it just means we are *set apart*, that you have a *calling*. It gives us an idea that we can zero in on what we think God wants us to do. That’s all it really means. One of the things that is clear, the elders of the church, those with ascension gift ministries, no matter how much fame or fortune, have only one task: to *oversee* what the Holy Spirit is doing in *His* church. Overseeing means, *“Gee, I see the Holy Spirit moving over there. Let me encourage it.”* It means to encourage that particular person to bite into the gifts of God that have been given them. The music ministry, the children’s ministry, wherever you find God moving in your heart. We oversee that to ensure that it is done correctly and in order, not to your own glory and edification but for the building up of Christ, the kingdom of God.

Churches often get in trouble when they identify themselves with one *particular* vision and hone in on only that, saying “*We are the church of grace,*” or “*We are the church of healing,*” or “*We are the church of missions,*” etc. I’ve heard this. I’m not making this up. It is very common of churches today even those without senior pastors. They have this identity. Our identity should NOT be in a mission. Our identity should be in Christ alone! He will give us the mission. Sometimes there is just a season for things and *seasons change*. The problem is, when you identify with a mission and its purpose and then the season changes you are not willing to move on. The tradition, the paradigm, the pattern has already been set; you are left with the “cloud” moving on, with the fire of the Holy Spirit moving to some other place.

I’m not talking about numbers. I’m talking about what God is doing in your midst. So, what is the vision of the church? The vision is to bring the kingdom of God here on the earth. Our mission is whatever that takes. Someone said, “*I don’t know whether we should be ministering to the kids of the local neighborhoods or not.*” “*Are you kidding me. How could we even be asking such a question?! Jesus says, ‘Forbid not the children coming to Me.’*” If there is one thing that doesn’t need prayer, that’s one of them. It needs to be covered and soaked in prayer but not questioned. I know what God has already said concerning this direction. Spread the gospel, bring His kingdom here on the earth. How can we do that? By ministering to the children. Amen.

Traditions

We have around us, traditions. *Traditions do a lot*. They’re often not even grounded. They are just traditions. Haven’t we watched the late senate hearings lately? They are surrounded with traditions, not just rules. They have rules too (rules that apparently can be broken). But traditions are even more powerful, being in the “pattern” of life that we go through. We get up in the morning, eat breakfast, having some tradition of what we go through each day. Walk into the kitchen and everything should be there in the cupboard, dishes in the sink, whatever. You are very comfortable with that daily tradition. But when the Lord asks us to depart from that and start something else, are we willing? What do we do?

When visiting the Philippines, we go downstairs in the base housing and the tradition and pattern were not what I was used to. The refrigerators had items with names and numbers on them of what belonged to whom, little notes all over the refrigerator. I wasn’t used to that so I lost a lot of weight when I was there. I couldn’t quite adapt.

God wants to break through traditions so He can use you in a new way. And so, for twenty-seven years I worked for the Veterans Administration; I had a tradition of getting up every morning and going to work. Then I was on-call, going in whenever they called me. Nowadays I no longer do that. It is no longer the tradition like it was. God had other things for me. So, traditions are not necessarily bad but we need to be able to step out of them when God wants us to.

Tactical

There is another aspect to church government, tactics (*the art or skill of employing available means to accomplish an end*). We have different ways of doing things. Some people pick up the children with cars to get them here to church. Some people are in charge of that. That is a tactic. Churches always have tactical missions. Deacons are really called to oversee the tactical, to see that things are being done correctly, not just being done correctly in the sight of the law but with an ethic that goes beyond human ethics into *Godly* ethics. The deacons are called to oversee that aspect of the church. For instance there may be arguments. Why is that a surprise to us?

I love it when I go through marriage counseling and a couple may say, “*We never argue.*” A year later, still no major arguments. My prayer is “*O, brother, hold on!*” You know when I was in government service, I went through being-a-facilitator training for two weeks. You don’t just play at it. They actually put you into real circumstances where warring parties have to agree and work to a conclusion to come together. One of the things said over and over again, fundamental in any text book, was, “*You are not really working together until you have had your first argument.*” If there is no argument, you are really making way for the other person, enabling them, letting them have their way. And so, after there is a big blow-up, after there is conflict, emerging from that group, whether it is two people in marriage or whether it is a church or whatever, emerging out of that is an interdependence on the Holy Spirit between you, not dependant on one or the other or one idea, but and interdependence on the Holy Spirit Himself! The real church government.

Good Works

All of that is to let you do one thing. Good works. Not dead or meaningless works, works that can be erased, but good works. We heard earlier that our sister after helping a child years ago (not knowing where they ended up after all the good work she had put into him) found out that years

later he had “come through,” an eternal work. Sometimes we don’t see the outcome of them but they are eternal.

We have to go through this conflict phase in every group even here years ago, for example. God added to us eight families. You had better be *sure* that there is going to be conflict. Why is this person doing this? Why is that tactic acceptable? What is that tradition? All of these questions come up. Who is your allegiance to? Do you remember in the early church, “*I’m of Paul. I’m of Apollos. No, I’m of Jesus.*” They were all picking persons rather than the Holy Spirit leading them. It isn’t about a person!

Most church splits occur because of personality issues, sometimes violently. Sometimes not like that; they just kind of “melt away.” I remember there once was an elder here a long time ago and when he died a lot of the church just left. Why? Why? The Lord said to me, “*Because they were dependent upon that particular elder.*” They were dependent upon his ideas, his methods, his traditions. When he passed away, so did they. Some of them stayed with the Lord but not with the church they had been related to. What is the church anyway? It is a **family** of believers. Therefore if you are not knit into a family of believers it makes a big difference. How you are knitted in is important. If you are knitted into a personality, there should be alarms going off! If you are knitted in because of a particular ministry, there should be alarms going off! “*That’s not why I am here.*”

For a season you may be related to a particular ministry but then God may move on and you need to be ready.

Disenchantment

There is also a disenchantment of everything in general. You are no longer “turned on.” The hot fire of the Spirit just doesn’t seem to be there. How many times have I gone and interviewed somebody or a family that has left the Fountain of Life? They would say, “*Well, we just aren’t getting fed in there. Or it is not exciting there. The church across the street is more exciting. I get better ministry by listening to Derick Prince.*” Whatever popular online preacher. There is a general disenchantment. Let me tell you there is an *important function for disenchantment*, a Godly function. If you are unsatisfied that isn’t necessarily a bad thing. Don’t get bitter, but recognize that the dissatisfaction is sparking within you, by the Holy Spirit, to do something! Do something! “*I’m so disenchanting. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know. Sigh. It’s always the same. I’m so discouraged. . .*” Well, wake up! There is something that’s going on inside that’s bigger than you.

When I see the men of the church not coming forward as much as the women, the church tends to become a matriarchal type of society. God

doesn't want that. He wants the men of the church to step up and be men! Bring forth the exhortation. Bring forth the prophesy. Bring forth the teaching. Bring forth the prayer of understanding. Cover your brothers and sisters in prayer and encouragement. There is really no room to be discouraged. You can be disenchanting for a while but there is no room for it to continue. The Holy Spirit uses it, encourages you and you move on.

Most people leave the church when that happens because they didn't find a method or a way to be fulfilled in themselves. So successful churches of today know that. They have been to the same schools that I've been to. They know what it is going to take to get people involved. Give them their own little home/cell group. Give them their own little ministry, let them feel like they are in charge. Give them a "title." Director of International Affairs, Chief Evangelist, etc. There was actually a person with that title where I once attended. Director of Student Needs. Etcetera. What did Jesus say about that? *"Don't call anyone Teacher. Don't call anybody Rabbi."* He wasn't talking about a particular person's name; He was talking about a *title* that somehow you are putting upon yourself to make yourself feel fulfilled. If that's what is making you feel fulfilled, then you have missed the point! It is not upon this that Jesus is building His church. It is upon *His anointing* in you by the Holy Spirit.

Plurality

One of the things that we've built into the church here, differently than anywhere else in this area, is plurality. Not one elder is in charge. Not one person is the Pastor. Not one person is the Teacher. We try to encourage a plurality of ministry even at the very top so that no one can say, *"Well, this is so-and-so's church. This is his idea. This is what God is doing and we are following after him."* Heaven forbid you should follow after me or anyone else here. We follow after the Lord. There are certain safeguards which one may not notice. Paul, Wayne and myself definitely do so. We avoid something called "Pastor burn out." For instance someone having to teach every single Sunday burns a person out. The average life of a single-pastor to be in a church is *four years*. That's it! Then they move on. Why? They are burned out! For instance, *"I've talked to Martha and she never responds. The board of deacons is after me again, etc."* So we see a pastor burn out. A pastor said this to me once, *"I need just a small pastorate in the countryside."* But The smaller they get, the worse it becomes!

One of the persons I knew in Vermont (she was an adult when we were just kids) said to me, *"It is terrible here. Everybody knows me."* Within a five mile radius she knew everybody. Whereas in my neighborhood here in Kingston, I don't know very many people. And even more so,

in New York City, one wouldn't know the people in the apartment right next to you. There is no relationship with them. Therefore, the smaller the church doesn't mean you can necessarily avoid people. Churches aren't for avoiding people anyway, is it? It is for getting to know one another so that the church can really have feet and can walk and understand the gifts of the Spirit, flowing through you and in you and to other people. It is more blessed to give than to receive. If you come to receive, good for you but it is better to go to church *to give*.

Peer Review

In this church we also have the idea of “peer review” within the eldership. Not everybody here knows what that means. In a work situation, there are employee performance evaluations. A peer review is nice in a church setting. When the critics of your work are your friends who love you, it is not bad. One could harshly say, *“I don't trust you when tell me that was the worst teaching you've ever heard in your life!”* If I don't trust you what do I do with the criticism? I throw it away. But if I trust you and love you and you come and say, *“Peter, there's something wrong with that teaching.”* Then I want to know what they see is going on. You see then there begins a give and take and we can receive the criticism given in love. Isn't that true? It may still hurt. Criticism is never easy. But in a place where it can spark the creativity of God in you and the other person, it is an awesome thing. Together you can walk through the problems you are having whether it is in ministry or in any other place in your life, a peer review critique. It is very important. Years ago there were a few elders in this church, who are no longer here, where you couldn't talk to them about their children, or about their finances, etc. Our lives are an open book when it comes to eldership. They look into your life and if you have a problem then explain it to the others, tell them the problem you are having at home or having with your finances. They are here to help. God has created a safe-place, a safe-place of encouragement, a place of strength, a place of undergirding (not tearing down or tearing you to pieces to survive or not).

We are not a garden where we take a plant and throw it into the ground and walk away to let it live or die. No. You are gardener; you come back and tend it to make sure it is cultivated and fertilized, watered. What a wonderful thing to have a plurality in leadership. Jesus knows that. He knew the value of that. He *was* concerned about church government. Was He for plurality? Was He for singular ministry? Yeah, the **singular ministry of Jesus Christ as Lord, King of kings, Lord of lords**. As long as that is happening you will never have burn-out nor be afraid of criticism and you will allow the talents of the Lord to be distributed within the body of

Christ without a threat to you personally. When there is a single ministry the tendency is to perceive an up and coming ministry as a threat to what you are doing. You think to yourself that pretty soon they will take over. But, God Himself has already taken over. It is His church, body, soul and Spirit.

Sometimes I don't act that way as there is still some of my "old flesh" that still needs to die. However I *know* in my spirit that this thing called "Peter Scott" belongs to Him. It doesn't belong to me; it belongs to Him. That is good! Amen.

Conflicts

I've already told you something of conflicts. Conflicts are a necessary part of growth, again, a *necessary part of growth*. Without it you are not really growing. Whenever I have an argument with my wife, not all that infrequent, even now forty-eight years later, we have disagreements. Sometimes I just cannot see past things. Aaah, how is this ever going to be resolved?! Or maybe a conflict between you and your children. To your eyes they are going down the wrong path . . . Or they think, "*My parents just don't understand.*" Conflicts are a necessary part of that growth process so that after that conflict is broken in the power of Christ and it becomes putty in His hands, it is changed and fashioned into a more reasonable way to hold and contain the Holy Spirit. A safe-place allows for disagreements . . . something our Congress could learn.

Another thing the Congress could learn is interdependence, not a political party, but an interdependence on the power and the grace of God. It is still written "**In God We Trust**" in our Senate. Well let it be, Lord Jesus! Let it happen again! Let it breathe in them something of life in the midst of all the current conflict, the schemes and erratic behavior.

The Outcome

The result of all this is interesting. The government of the church is Jesus as the Head, elders overseeing what the Holy Spirit is doing, deacons working out the tactical operations (more on that in a minute) creating this place we call church, not a building, but where we gather together where *Jesus is Center*. And, He is so much the center that we are devoted to Him. Do you know what they said about the early church? They continued in *devotion* to Christ. They continued in *devotion* to prayer as talking to Christ. They continued in *devotion* to the Word of God as preached by the Apostles and the elders who were in charge. Why? Because the Word of God IS Jesus; Jesus is the Word.

They were *devoted* also to gathering together. It wasn't a casual thing they did. They were devoted to it. "*I don't know whether I should go to church today? I don't feel good.*" However a lot of days I don't feel good but I am *devoted* to it. Now do you have a job? Do they give you a check? Now when you don't feel well and your sick time has expired, what do you do? You go to work. Why? Because you are devoted to that paycheck. But the people of God are not devoted to some kind of feedback system where they get something from church. They are devoted to the church of Christ because of what they can give there! It may only be a word of encouragement, a smile or an Amen. But they are devoted to gathering together.

Lastly they are *devoted* to the good works that are set before them. They are not going to walk out and say "I'm sorry. I just cannot do it any more. I'm tired to this" etc. But rather they are *devoted, faithful and true* to what God has called them to. Amen.

Body ministry, plurality of church government, singular purpose, Jesus in charge. . . What could be better?

Qualifications for Elders

*In 1 Timothy 3: 1-7, This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a **bishop**, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the **church** of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a **good testimony among those who are outside**, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

I have to tell you that I have never an elder that met all of these classifications or qualifications. But, we are headed in the right direction by the grace of God, we walk in this ministry. By the grace of God when I find myself not so hospitable, or find myself greedy, find myself quarrelsome, what do I do? I have to *die* to those things of the flesh and put on the righteousness of Christ, whether that is through the encouragement of my brothers and sisters, no matter who they are in the body of Christ, I am given to that. That is exactly why the body of Christ is such a good place to be. When you are all by yourself, you don't have that ability, that team behind you.

Qualifications for Deacons

Then the Word says something about the qualifications for deacons.

1 Timothy 3: 8-13, Likewise . . .

Before we get to this, lets get the other two elders and Dan Wilber (whom we are about to set in as a deacon) to come in for the conclusion of this message.

. . . deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

Holding to the mystery of the faith. Faith isn't just something we put on and say, "Oh yeah, I believe it." Faith has a **mystery** involved with it and we need to understand that. We don't need to apologize for the fact that we believe in the Holy Spirit. We don't have to apologize! We have a pure conscience about it. "Do you really believe in angels?" Yeah, hello! "Do you really believe in the Holy Ghost?" Yeah, I do! He lives inside of me. That scares some people.

But let these also first be tested:

Almost every ministry needs to be first tested whether it be prophecy or exhortation, etc. Where most of the testing is done is in home groups. That's where it should be done, where you can try out your ministry so to speak and become good at it. That means listening to the Holy Spirit.

*. . . then let them **serve** as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a **good standing** and **great boldness** in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

So the understanding that Dan will experience more after we lay hands on him this morning, is that though he has been doing the work of a deacon after he is ordained and recognized as one, he will see that there is a *boldness* that he will have, the boldness that is imparted to him through the word of God. He will understand more and in a clearer way.

The Ordination

One of the things that is really cool about deacons is that God can use them in different ways, tactical, resolving conflicts, being mindful of the Holy Spirit. But let's read what it says further in Acts 6:

*Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 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.**”*

There are times when elders are called to do that also, but the idea behind this was that the Lord had given them a specific task as leaders and that was to declare and teach the word of God and to pray. Therefore if they were taken up in resolving conflicts between what was happening tactically and handing distributions to the widows, there was something wrong with that picture. Something had to be done.

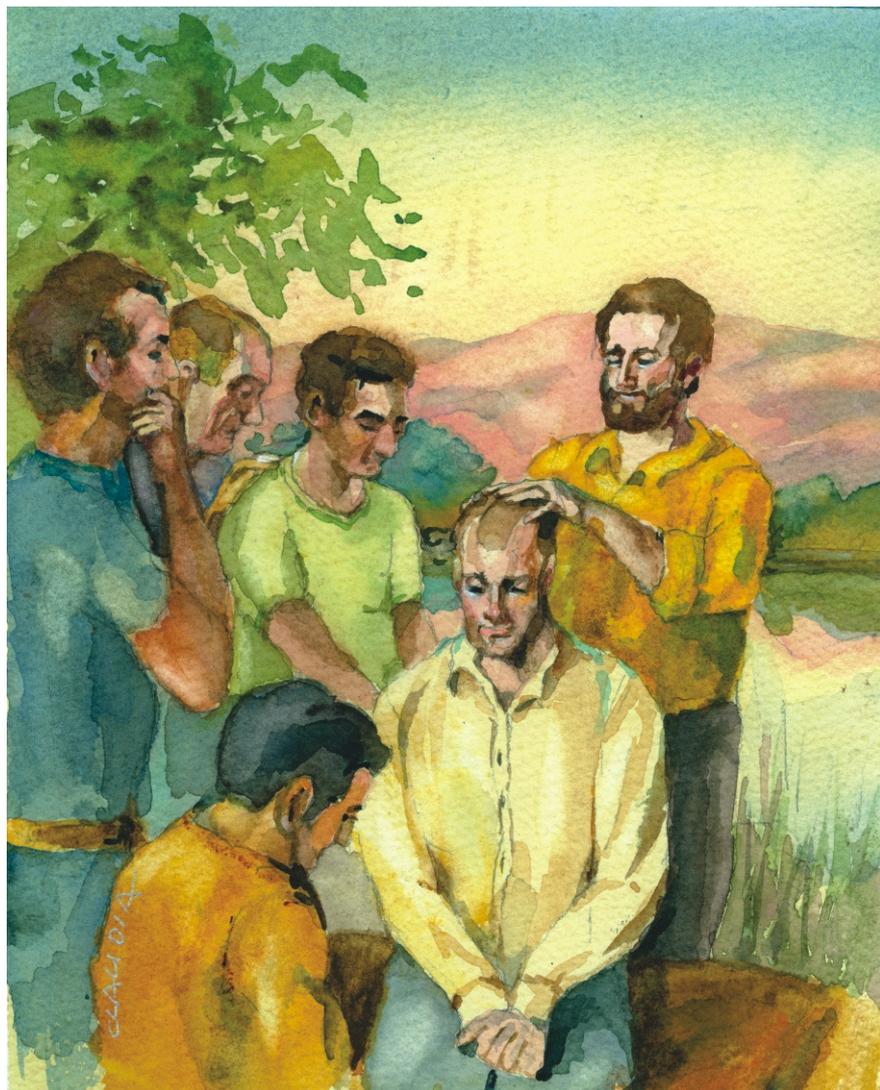
*Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, **full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,***

What was the qualification? First that the body of Christ would pick them out and secondly that the Holy Spirit is in them, full of His wisdom.

. . . whom we may appoint (ordaining means to appoint and recognize) over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

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

That is exactly what we intend to do today in ordaining Dan Wilber as a deacon. We set before you what we saw and what we are seeing God do in Dan’s life. We saw the wonderful things that he is doing in ministering in the church and we should recognize him. So we turned it over to the whole church and asked what you also thought. We got a lot of good input. Now we come to this place, the same as in the early church, to lay hands on Dan and to recognize him before God and before the people of God that he will have the boldness that is due his ministry. Amen.



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