

The Menace of Men's Business Meetings to Oversee the Work

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Since the days of the apostles men have struggled to reform, refine, rearrange, rebuild and refurbish the organization and work of the church Christ built. Every effort has ended in apostasy and the creation of hundreds of manmade religious bodies to curse humanity. Many became angry and left the foundation of the faith for the religious fields open to them from the minds and works of man.

A principle adopted by some in the beginning of the Restoration Movement is: *We speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the Bible is silent.* That involved doing Bible things in Bible ways. This principle is also stated in inspired scripture: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:11).

Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven (Matt. 7:21). "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son (2 John 1:9). "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

The above verses plainly teach that none of us may go beyond or come short of the revelation of Jesus Christ without incurring the wrath of God and eternal damnation.

In addition, the apostle Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after men. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:6-12).

The above passages clearly establish these facts: 1) Nothing can be done without Bible authority; 2) In no instance may we go beyond what is written by the authority of Christ; 3) In no instance may we come short of the authority of Christ; 4) The only authority recognized by Christ is His word revealed to us in the "word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5). It is complete and will furnish each of us unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Substitutes for the Eldership

I am not trying to be **negative** about the work and worship of the church, but no one can be **scriptural** without being **negative** when the inspired scriptures are negative. We dare not try to "eliminate the negative" in an appeal to the "positive" minded brethren who do not respect all the inspired word of God.

God sent Jeremiah to His people with a clear message: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. 1:8-10).

Jeremiah was sent to require four negative things **first**: 1) "to root out" 2) "to pull down" 3) "to destroy" 4) "to throw down." He then was to require two positive things: 1) "to build" and 2) "to plant." His mission required twice as much negative preaching as positive preaching. The New Testament requires much negative preaching to provoke "repentance" and "obedience" to the gospel of Christ.

The continual effort since the beginning of the Restoration to implant some new and different oversight in the local church has resulted in division after division. The process continues. Often such departures come from within the eldership because some are not qualified or have left the truth. Paul spoke of this in Acts 20:28-30.

"Leadership" may be a dangerous word when applied to any effort at oversight or supervision of the work and worship of the local church. It implies improper authority in the hands of a few who assume they are qualified to act as "overseers" when the church has no bishops (Acts 20:28). Sometimes they are called "chairman" or "committees" or "directors" or "leaders." Someone asks, "What can they be called?" That is a good question! What do you call anything relating to the church that has no basis in scripture? Whatever it is called, it is unscriptural and wrong as applied to the oversight!

Scripturally appointed elders who are qualified exercise the only authorized "leadership" in the oversight of the church. No one else has the divine right to claim the *leadership* in the church except those who can scripturally be appointed *overseers* - the elders of a local church. Christ made it that way, and it cannot be changed!

Scriptural teachers, preachers and deacons who exercise some direction in a Bible class are "leaders" in the limited sense of leading the study of the Bible in the class. Absolutely no authority is stated or implied beyond that Bible class. This is not a "leadership" in ruling anybody.

Faithful members of the church who set a good example by their words and deeds exercise some "leadership" by setting the spiritual examples of what following Christ means. None of this "leadership" has any authority or oversight in the work and worship of the church of Christ.

When we speak of "leaders" in the church, we should designate the character of such leadership, for if we speak of "leadership" as the governing power of the congregation, we should make sure we are speaking of the eldership.

There is a practice that "LEADERS" should be appointed in the church in the place of elders, if none are qualified, and that they should be called *Leaders* instead of *Elders*. This is another way to avoid obeying the Lord by appointing men to the eldership who are qualified. Many qualified men are never appointed elders because of jealousy and envy on the part of some others in the church. However, in the case where no man is *scripturally qualified* to be appointed to the eldership, what scriptural principle could be used to substitute another "office" called "Leaders" in the place of the elders? Any such would do violence to the word of God. Also the "Office Of The Leaders" provides a way of placing in the oversight men who can not qualify to be elders. It is disobedience to God!

Majority Rule (Business Meetings)

Some have tried to make the *Business Meeting* the substitute for the eldership.

If these "Business Meetings" are to become the ruling part of a congregation, what is to hinder this force from changing the worship or making new regulations regarding any part of the work of the church? If one answers, "The Bible will keep them from doing that," I answer, "The Bible did not keep them from forming an organization of oversight unknown to the Bible; and if they do one thing unknown to the Bible, why will they not go further and do something else?"

No one should legislate where God has not legislated. Some try to turn the church into a democratic convention, and resort to popular vote and majority rule in the oversight. The majority-rule system of church government is as unscriptural and sinful as any ecclesiastical system taught by Catholics and others of denominational groups.

Problems of the Business Meetings

Usually the Business Meetings will involve some of the following departures from the faith:

1. It will slide into a "majority rule" body, with all its arguing and debating for "my way" conclusions and decisions. It leaves little place for peace and harmony among the saints. The kingdom of Christ is not a democratic body.
2. As it goes on, it genders party factions that struggle for the control of certain projects and eliminates those who do not contend.
3. Most *Business Meetings* go on and on and on with very little progress in many instances. In the first place, they sometimes try to do things for which they have no divine authority. They cannot find authority to create a ruling body to do something someone wants to do, and they try to invent some way to use human authority. Once a man is given some authority in something by the "Business Meeting," (which it cannot scripturally do) he assumes it is his authority and position from then on and no one should suggest that he relinquish it and do something else. Of course, this is not often the case, but it is easy to drift into that problem. Many of the problems arise over who has the divine right to do some things with apparent oversight, and who has the divine right to "appoint" others to do such work. For instance,

how shall we test men and women for teachers in Bible classes, and who will do it? How shall we determine the material for class study? Who shall purchase what is needed for the church and classes? Who will plan the financial program of the church? Who will direct the preacher in his work? Who will take the authority to discipline unruly members? If anyone knows any verse in the Bible that authorizes any person other than bishops to oversee this work, please let me know. I have looked a long time for that authority from the Holy Spirit and have not yet found it. Do the *Business Meetings* have the divine authority to appoint people to these responsibilities and oversee them? **No! Certainly not!** The only oversight and supervision of these responsibilities is in the eldership of the local church.

4. *Business meetings* often generate poor attitudes between the older and younger members. The younger men feel excluded and the older men feel rejected. It often generates bad feelings between the more aggressive men and the usually quiet men. It takes a lot of patience for brethren to simply *mutually agree* to a course of work in the absence of overseers, and some do not have it.
5. As *Business Meetings* continue and various programs are initiated, it is inevitable that some women will demand that they be included in the general *Business Meetings*. Sometimes they just say they want to sit in the back of the building and listen. Then they want to make "suggestions" and later they want a "vote" because, after all, there is as much authority for women to be in the *Business Meeting* as for the *Business Meeting* itself to "run" the church. The problem is, there is much truth in this.
6. Sadly, I have known of several "Business Meetings" that resulted in a "division" of the local church. Some few angry brethren pushed for their way about something that was either unscriptural or unwise. Some brethren who did not want to get into such a fuss, left the meeting and only the fighters remained. It was just a matter of time until the whole church divided over something that came about by unscrupulous persons who were very self-willed, ungodly men (and women). All of this takes place because some brethren become wise in the own conceits and depart from the authority of Christ.
7. Inevitably, *Business Meetings* will inspire the preacher to become ***The Leader and Supervisor*** of the work and worship of the local church. He will take it and run. The preacher has NO divine right to oversee or direct ANYTHING but his own work of preaching and teaching the word of God. He must "watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). Let him do that and no more. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). His work involves NO oversight in the local church.

Let me emphasize this by a passage from the Old Testament on the matter of obedience to God. Saul, the first king of Israel, was sent by God against the Amalekites with this instruction: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1 Samuel 15:3). That was specific and clear. There was no excuse for misunderstanding. But Saul and the people saved Agag the king, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good. He did not *utterly destroy* them all as God had told him. God sent Samuel to Saul and confronted him with his sin. He finally admitted his sin, but was rejected from being king over Israel. Samuel made this statement to Saul: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying

the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to harken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath rejected thee from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

This principle of truth is as binding today as it was in the days of Saul and Samuel. It is better to obey every word of the Lord than to offer all the sacrifices and offerings one has. God wants His people to OBEY HIS WORD without question.

What then can the *Business Meeting* do if it has no divine authority to appoint and supervise? The ONLY righteous function of a *Business Meeting* is to **mutually** consider and agree (without a majority vote) on any course of action, ALWAYS in accord with the word of God in every instance, with no person exercising authority and oversight in the church except qualified elders. This requires a spirit of unity and peace of all brethren without partiality and superiority, and with humbleness of heart. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3). There is NO oversight of a local church in the absence of scripturally qualified elders duly appointed to such work.

Committee Rule

This is a very popular system of church rule. It is based upon two suppositions: 1) A "necessary inference" (How else can we do it?) 2) It is the most successful and approved method in clubs, lodges, schools, etc., hence, it will work well in the church.

The New Testament does not teach that the church may form several organizations called "committees" to do different things in oversight of the local church. The only authority ever delegated by Christ in the church, in the way of oversight, was the eldership. The elders may assign certain work to a person or group of persons, but they cannot delegate the oversight to anyone. One may as well try to get to heaven by not obeying the gospel as to try to get into the oversight without scriptural qualifications.

Imagine the church in Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Corinth, or Ephesus, or any place in New Testament days having an official organization of the following committees:

- ▶ Membership Committee
- ▶ Devotion Committee
- ▶ Social Committee
- ▶ Community Committee
- ▶ Finance Committee
- ▶ Recreation Committee
- ▶ New Member Committee
- ▶ Janitorial Committee
- ▶ House and Grounds Committee
- ▶ Organization Committee
- ▶ Invitation Committee
- ▶ Transporting Committee (Transportation)
- ▶ Visitation Committee

- ▶ Ushering Committee
- ▶ Preaching and Teaching Committee
- ▶ Bulletin Committee
- ▶ Absentee Committee
- ▶ Revival Committee (Revival Meetings)
- ▶ Advertising Committee
- ▶ Funeral Committee

I have seen in bulletins and reports from congregations every one of the above named committees, so I know that some churches have one to all of these committees operating in a ruling sense.

In the editorial of The Firm Foundation of March 6, 1951 brother G. H. P Showalter quotes from a deacon of a congregation who wrote to him: "There seems to be a general movement among the churches in Texas, California, and possibly other states, to supplant God's plan of governing the local churches through their elders and deacons. Committees are appointed for every work of the church. They are supervisory in their nature and leave nothing for the elders and deacons to do in their official capacity. I am a deacon here in one of the congregations, but I am at a loss to find any work left for me to do as a deacon. The list of committees that have been in use in this congregation since about 1945 are: 1) Advertising, 2) Bible School, 3) Charity, 4) Finance and Building, 5) Flowers, 6) Funerals, 7) Grounds, 8) Meals, 9) Songs, 10) Ushers, 11) Missions, 12) Pulpit, 13) Reception-men, 14) Reception-women, 15) Sitting up, 16) Visitation-men, 17) Visitation-women, 18) Committee on Committees . . . "

One of the greatest objections to this system, besides being unscriptural, is that sometimes women are placed on the committees, and are even made chairmen of them, especially so of committees for women. The Lord did not intend that women should be placed in the oversight or supervision of the Lord's work.

Webster defines "Committee" as "a body of persons to whom any business is committed." The ordinary meaning of the word may apply to a group of persons assigned to a certain work by the elders, but this group can assume no authority or oversight because the elders cannot delegate their oversight to others. Nor can such "committees" be formed to substitute for the eldership. Such work as financing, preaching, teaching, etc., needs no "committee" group because it is directly the work of the elders.

Two great objections may be offered against self-styled or majority appointed committees in the church. 1) When a committee is established to do a special work it often eliminates all the other members from that work, and often it is a work that all members should do, such as visiting the sick or helping the poor. If others try to do this work the committee is horribly offended! 2) Committees so appointed for a special work under special circumstances sometimes arrogate to themselves PERMANENT and OFFICIAL authority in the matter, and will insist upon performing that function always.

Since the New Testament nowhere authorizes "committees" to assume authoritative or supervisory positions in the organization of the church, we must not allow it to permeate the scriptural oversight

of the church. The New Testament church can and did perform its full mission without "committees," and it can do so now. All such are innovations in the local organization of the church.

Inter-Congregational Rule

In the days of the Restoration several prominent men thought, as Alexander Campbell, that there were some things to be done by the church that were too large for the local church, hence some organization should be formed to carry on this work. One consequence of this idea is the organized Missionary Society of today. This same idea is at work today among many in trying to find a way to lock hundreds and thousands of congregations together in caring for orphans and in doing mission work at home and abroad.

One of the greatest weaknesses of modern denominationalism is its "top-heavy" organizations. The church of Christ in some places is following the same pattern. We become as weak as they when we set aside the wisdom of God in organization and try to establish similar inter-congregational ties of organization. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. 1:27). The world may look upon the simplicity of the local organization as weak, but it is the most powerful in all the world because it is of God. I say again, no man can improve upon the arrangement of God.

Some organizations are smaller than the local church. It is as wrong to have an organization smaller than the local church as to have one larger, including several churches. Some have organized "Sunday School Classes" with their officers and treasuries. Others have "Youth Organizations" of various kinds with full election of officers. These sorts of organized groups within and without the church should not be allowed. It is adding to and substituting for the scriptural organization of the church.

If we want this church to be after the New Testament pattern, we must be careful to do all things according to the pattern delivered to us. We must not go beyond or come short of this pattern.