

GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

Miscellaneous Considerations Collected by Mike Aylestock

“The doctrine of absolute Church independence has always been a favorite one with our people. Under it they have greatly flourished, and very few have complained of its operation.”
— Dr. David Benedict, Baptist Historian

Types of Church Government

- a. Episcopal (overseer) — Centralized Authority (governed by the authority of bishops)
— Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Roman Catholic

- b. Presbyterian (elders) — Delegated Authority (governed by the elected representatives)
— Presbyterian, Reformed Churches

- c. Congregational — Church Authority (Jesus Christ — governed by actual congregation via “congregational determination of God’s will”)
— Baptists, Evangelical Free, Congregational, some Lutheran

Scriptural Authority For Congregational Government

The New Testament church acted in:

- a. Self-Judgement — I Corinthians 5:13
- b. Self-Election — Acts 6, 14; Titus 1
- c. Self-Settlement — I Corinthians 6
- d. Self-Government — Matthew 18

Explanation of Congregational Government

A church is an organism, a body with an authoritative head — Jesus Christ. The government is, therefore a theocracy. Thus the church is not legislative (legislating its own rules and policies) but rather the church is administrative (carrying out Jesus Christ's rules and policies). How does the church identify Christ's mind on any given issue? With the Bible as the source of principles the church membership seeks God's will. That will is then identified by congregational vote. We trust that the decision made by the majority vote is expressive of God's will.

Congregational vote is therefore **congregational determination of God's will**. The determining body is the congregation present at any business meeting.

In congregational government the church is NOT subject to the following:

- Any Part of Itself
- Any Religious “body” or “organization” Outside Itself
- Any Government

IS THE CHURCH A DEMOCRACY? NO!!!

The Laodicean Church was a democracy. “Laodicea” comes from two words:
“laos” — people
“dikao” — to rule

“Its name designates it as the Church of mob rule, the democratic Church, in which everything is swayed and decided by popular opinion, clamor and voting; and hence a self-righteous and self-sufficient Church.”
— J. A. Seiss

Place of the Pastor in Congregational Government

“The pastor exercises only such control over the body as his official and personal influence may allow, as their teacher and leader and the expounder of the great Lawgiver's enactments. His influence is paramount, but not his authority. In the decision of questions he has but his single vote. His rule is in the moral force of his counsels, his instruction and guidance in matters of truth and duty, and also in wisely directing the assemblies whether for worship or business.”
— Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*

A POLITICALLY ASTUTE PEOPLE

Americans have always realized that the maintenance of a free society requires a politically educated people, people who understand the workings of free government and can rule themselves upon a foundation of Christian morality. Thomas Jefferson expressed the concept well when he said:

“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.”

At the time America became an independent nation, many Americans were astute in all areas of knowledge, especially political theory. Ben Franklin declared that all worthwhile books and pamphlets published in England were within a few weeks available in the colonies. Just as the War for Independence came to a close, he described the American people as follows:

“We are more thoroughly an enlightened people, with respect to our political interest, than perhaps any other under heaven. Every man among us reads, and is so easy in his circumstances as to have leisure for conversations of improvement and for acquiring information.”

More important than abstract theory, however, Americans had worked out and practiced for years the political principles that seemed to work best for their circumstances.

— U.S. History text, 11th grade, A Beka Books, p. 73

TRUE LEADERSHIP

“Some men think that modern armies may be so regulated that a general can sit in an office and play on his several columns as on the keys of a piano; this is a fearful mistake. The *directing mind* must be at the *very head of the army*—must be *seen* there, and the effect of his mind and personal energy must be *felt* by every officer and man....” — Wm. Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs*

Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf quoted Sherman (above) in the February 11, 1991 *U.S. News & World Report*. Gen. Schwarzkopf was the commander of Desert Storm, the 1990 war against Iraq's Saddam Huessin.