

**Title: Elders**

**Text: 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:1**

**Theme: Elders, Bishops, Pastors**

**General Proposition: The government of the church has been established by God.**

**Specific Proposition: The mature believer understands that the supreme government of the Church is God.**

### **Introduction**

In preparation for the meeting we will have after the service, today's topic will focus on church government. This is not the first time we have studied this topic, so some of you are already familiar with it; however, it is good to study it in case any of you have not heard of a study on the subject.

When we talk about church government, it is very important to understand that the design of the Church, to begin with, was done by Jesus Christ Himself. He is the one who tells the disciples to go preach the gospel to every creature and establish the Church. In Matthew 16:16, Peter makes a declaration that becomes the foundation of the Church: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” It is upon this declaration, or this rock, that Jesus establishes the Church.

But God, through the Holy Spirit, inspired holy men to write the Scriptures and to make it very clear to us what the government of the Church is.

So, what is important to remember is that God Himself establishes the Church and its government; therefore, it is an ordinance established by God that cannot be changed or negotiated. We can argue, decide, even establish something different, but we cannot change what God established.

Reading the Word of God and applying it in the Church is, has been, and I pray that it will continue to be the hallmark of our Church. So today we are going to take a Biblical tour—not very exciting, not very long, but Biblical—about what the Bible says about Church government and what some people have established in its place.

I want to clarify that what we are going to study is what the Bible says, which does not reflect what today's society thinks, but it does reflect the position of our church simply because the Bible says so.

*The position of our beloved Iglesia Bautista Hispana Winchester is to follow, to the extent possible, the clear instructions of the Bible. This should be the position of every member of our church.*

## *The Elders*

### *1 Timothy 3:1*

Paul's instructions regarding the elders of the Church are quite clear, and he begins by encouraging all the brothers to seek to become elders. So, the first thing we need to understand is what an elder of the church is.

Paul uses the word *ἐπίσκοπος – episkopos* – to refer to bishops, or elders, or pastors. In the Bible, we find the word "elder" to refer to older men. 1 Peter 5:1 “*I exhort the elders who are among you, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ...*” In this instance, the word used is presbyters, which, in some contexts, is also used to refer to seniors.

We have called them elders, rather than bishops, because of the English translation of Elders, which is what they are called in the Fellowship church we were incorporated with.

### *1 Timothy 3:1-7*

Although the list is not very long, it is quite strict. Paul says that if any of us want to be a bishop, then we need to meet these requirements.

However, I like to clarify these requirements; I like to divide them into two: those that can be changed, and those that cannot. What you can change, and I hope we can all achieve, is: *become blameless, sober-minded, prudent, respectable, hospitable, apt to teach; not given to wine, not quarrelsome, not greedy for dishonest gain, but gentle, peaceable, not covetous; managing his own house well, keeping his children in subjection with all reverence, and having a good report from outsiders.*

What cannot be changed: *the husband of one wife*. It is necessary that the bishop be a man; otherwise, he cannot be a husband. And, after believing for salvation, he must have been married only once and remain married; he cannot be a husband if he is no longer married.

### *Philippians 4:8*

If you want to continue growing in Christ, if you want to stop being a neophyte, that is, a novice, a beginner, a learner, a novice, you can follow Paul's advice to the Philippians: "*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*"

## *Church Government*

### *Titus 1:4-5*

Paul writes to Titus, one of his coworkers, whom he had asked to stay in Crete, and tells him why he left him there. This church had some deficiencies, and he had to repair them.

The way Titus had to begin repairing the church in Crete was by establishing *πρεσβύτερος – elders* – to begin, they are to restore order in the Church. One of the elderly's roles is to restore order, or to establish and ensure that certain rules are followed within the church.

### *Titus 1:10-11*

Another role of the elders is to ensure that the Church's teachers, whether of children, women, or men and the church in general, ensure that the teaching is completely biblical, and to stop those who are only trying to make a name for themselves in the church, but are not edifying the church with their teachings; rather, they are seeking their own gain.

### *Titus 1:6-9*

Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus are the same. Titus's are easier for me to understand, but they are the same. However, he tells Timothy that the elder should not be a neophyte or beginner, and he tells Titus that the elder should be someone who knows the Scriptures well, not like a novice, and who can use them to exhort with sound doctrine and convince those who contradict it.

### *Hebrews 13:17-19*

An additional role that we, elders and pastors have is to watch over the souls of the congregation, or to lead them in prayer so that the church may move forward. This is one of the most important roles of Elders. So, elders have very specific requirements, and at the same time, they have very specific roles.

*Requirements: Male, married once, with a good reputation, who know the Word of God well.*

*Roles: Overseers of the church's teachings, and capable of teaching and exhorting with the Word of God.*

### *Elders and Deacons*

#### *1 Timothy 3:8-13*

Deacons also have a list of qualifications that align with those of elders regarding testimony and the fact that they are the husbands of one wife. However, there are differences in that they not only can be men, there are also female deacons, regarding the teaching of the Word of God, and regarding what deacons are to do with their ministry:

*"keeping the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."* That is, they are dealing with the personal life of the church, and they are required to be very discreet; while at the same time, nothing is mentioned about their biblical knowledge or its application. The question, then, would be why deacons are not required to teach the Word of God, what their function is.

#### *Acts 6:1-4*

The ministry of deacons is the first to be established in the Church; After the ministry of the apostles, the deacon is the oldest ministry in the Church. However, this service was never intended to be the one that governed the Church. In fact, deacons were charged with caring for the personal needs of the members of the Church. That is, they are charged with the ministry of visitation, not teaching. Therefore, deacons are required to keep the mystery; to be discreet, and not to go around telling what they saw in the house of a brother or sister when they visited.

#### *Philippians 1:1-2*

Paul makes a clear distinction between the elders of the church and the deacons. When he writes to the Philippians, he refers to both because both are important ministries of the Church, and each has a different function.

Since the words for elders, pastors, and bishops are the same, it is understood that these—the elders, pastors, and bishops—are those who govern the Church. Regarding deacons, the word used for deacon is *διάκονος* – *deacons* – which is a transliteration, not a translation, hence the confusion. However, it is clear that the deacons are in charge of the physical needs of the congregation, while bishops are in charge of the spiritual needs of the congregation.

#### *Conclusion*

So, when we talk about Church government, it is very important to understand that both the design and the government of the Church were established by Jesus Christ himself based on a fundamental declaration: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* We can argue, decide, even establish something different, but we cannot change what God established. Therefore, *the position of our beloved Iglesia Bautista Hispana Winchester is to follow, to the extent possible, the clear instructions of the Bible. This should be the position of every member of our church.* Paul's instructions regarding the elders (episcopos) of the Church are quite clear, and although the list is not very long, it is quite strict and can be divided into two: What you can change, and I hope we all achieve, is: *to become blameless, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, apt to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain, but gentle, quiet, not covetous,*

*managing his own house well, keeping his children in submission with all goodness, and that he have a good testimony from outsiders.* What cannot be changed: *the husband of one wife.* It is necessary that the bishop be male, otherwise he cannot be a husband, and that, after believing for salvation, he be married only once and remain married; he cannot be a husband if he is no longer married. So, the Elders have very specific requirements, and at the same time, they have very specific functions.

*Requirements: Male, married once, with a good testimony, who know the Word of God well.*

*Functions: Overseers of the Church's teachings, and capable of teaching and exhorting with the Word of God.*

On the other hand, deacons also have a list of requirements that align with those of the elders regarding testimony and being the husband of one wife. However, they cannot only be men; there are also female deaconesses. They are not required to teach from the Word of God, but they are required "*to guard the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*" That is, they are dealing with the personal life of the church, and they are required to be very discreet. Thus, *it is clear that the deacons are in charge of the physical needs of the congregation, while bishops are in charge of the spiritual needs of the congregation.*

**The government of the church has been established by God; however, the church that follows the pattern of God's government understands that the supreme government of the Church is God Himself.**