

The Church Is Not A Democracy

Living in America offers the Christian many blessings that Christians in some other nations do not enjoy. The freedom to worship, freedom to speak about the Bible, freedom to print and distribute literature for teaching, and many other freedoms, all contribute to the joy of serving Christ in America. However, there is at least one drawback that stems from being American citizens. Since this nation governs itself based upon the principles of democracy, it is easy for Christians to assume that these principles also should govern the church.

Evidence of this mindset sometimes is seen when Christians disagree with decisions the elders make. Church members sometimes lose their tempers because they were not consulted about decisions that were made. Apparently, they want the church to be governed democratically.

But the Lord never intended this form of government for the church. First of all, the church is a kingdom, and Christ is the King (Colossians 1:13). He has been given all authority (Matthew 28:18). Thus Christians, as subjects to the King, have no right to try to change the will of the King. This is what is wrong with seeking to change the church to meet the demands of society. Changing the church is rebellion against the King.

The King has also determined that each congregation of His people shall be overseen by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). While these men are given the charge of overseeing the flock (Acts 20:28), they certainly have no right to change the will of the King. But they have been charged with overseeing the congregation. The King has given the eldership authority over the local congregation. Thus, each member of that local congregation, because he/she is in submission to the King, must be in submission to the eldership.

Notice some of the things that the eldership has been charged to do. They are to oversee the church (Acts 20:28). According to Thayer, the word translated "*overseers*" (episkopos), means "*a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly*" (GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT). The very word used by Paul implies their position of authority over the church.

They are to take care of the church (1 Timothy 3:5). According to Vine, this word means "*to take care of, involving forethought and provision*" (VINE'S EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT WORDS). One of the prerequisites for a man to become an elder is that he rule well his own house. The planning, the care, the provision for things needed, the oversight, the responsibility, the accountability to God all are part of ruling one's house and in the same manner, taking care of the church.

They are to have the rule over the church (Hebrews 13:17). In the Lord's plan for the church, someone must be in a position of authority in the local congregation. Otherwise, no decision could be made. Matters of doctrine have already been established by the Lord. But some matters are matters of judgment and expediency. In these realms, when decisions

must be made for the congregation, the eldership has the rule.

What then should be the congregation's attitude toward the eldership? Christians are instructed to obey and submit to the eldership (Hebrews 13:17). This is not because these men are of any greater worth, but because they exercise the authority given them by Christ over the local congregation. And in submitting to Christ, they must submit to those who have been appointed according to the command of Christ to rule over the congregation.

When members of the local congregation properly submit themselves to Christ, they will realize that the church is not a democracy, and they will support the eldership in all that they scripturally do, realizing that these men have been given a serious charge.