

## **Sermon Outline**

### **“The Church of God” – How The Church Works: God’s Design for Governing His People Part 1 – Acts 20:28 – Joshua Harris – February 12, 2012**

#### **Introduction**

1. Defined and accepted lines of authority make for peace in homes, businesses or government. Where authority is misused or rejected, there is confusion, conflict and trouble. But when there are clear structures, when people know to whom they are accountable, when there is trust and confidence in leadership, there can be great productivity.
2. What’s true in the family, in business and in government is true of the local church. When authority is clearly and biblically defined, when there is defined accountability and when there is trust and confidence in leadership, the church is most effective in its mission.
3. In this new series, we want to consider the governance of the local church by examining the answers to the following questions: How does authority function in the church? Who’s in charge? Who makes the decisions? Who are the pastors/elders? What qualifies someone to be a pastor/elder and what is their job description? What is the role and responsibility of the congregation? What are deacons and what do deacons they do?

#### ***Why is the right governance and well-being of the church worthy of our careful attention?***

##### **Because It Is God’s Church (“...the church of God” – Acts 20:28b)**

1. In Acts 20:28, Paul reminds the elders that their responsibility is to care for and provide oversight of “the church of God.” That’s such an important phrase as it tells us to whom the church belongs. The church doesn’t belong to any man. It doesn’t belong to the Senior pastor. It doesn’t belong to the elders. It doesn’t belong to the congregation. It doesn’t belong to a denomination. It is God’s church!
  - a. God sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, “who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself *a people for his own possession* who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).
  - b. “But you are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).
  - c. The purpose for us being his special people is not to proclaim our specialness. It’s to proclaim *his* excellencies. The church exists to honor God. It exists to point to his greatness. It is not for the glory of man. The church of God exists to glorify and worship God alone.

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2. If the church is God's, then we should have a deep sense of responsibility to make sure that His church is structured according to His Word and that it functions with an integrity that displays to the world the multifaceted wisdom, grace and mercy of God.

### **Because Jesus Bought It With His Blood ("...which he obtained with his own blood..." – Acts 20:28c)**

1. We weren't freed from our guilt and rescued from God's wrath by our own goodness. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us "for you were bought with a price." And that price was the very life-blood of the Son of God poured out to cover our sins and reconcile us to God. How precious the church is to God! How can we have a low view of the church, how can we be apathetic and uncaring about it's health and well-being when we consider the cost paid to obtain the church?
  - a. "Once you were not a people, but now *you are God's people*; once you had not received mercy, but now *you have received mercy*." (1 Peter 2:10)
2. The church didn't create the gospel. The gospel gave birth to the church and the gospel is the church's message, treasure and power. The clear implication is that if we care about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must also care about the right governance and structuring of the church.
  - a. A church that is disorderly, unfaithful and wrongly led is a church that will obscure or contradict the gospel in its example. A church that ignores the Bible's direction for the qualifications of leaders or that ignores the authority of the Bible will soon be preaching a false gospel.
  - b. If we treasure the good news of salvation through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, then we must necessarily pay careful attention to care of the church of God.

### **Because God Has Given Us A Pattern For Its Governance ("...which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." – Acts 20:28a)**

1. In Acts 20:28, Paul is speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus. That fact tells us something about how New Testament churches were led. A team of elders led the churches Paul established. Paul didn't send for or address the Senior Pastor. There wasn't an individual pastor who had all authority, but a plurality of elders who shared authority.
2. Second, Paul speaks to these elders and tells us something of their job description.

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- a. They are to pay careful attention to the conduct of their own lives. Their example matters.
  - b. They are to pay careful attention to the flock, the group of Christians in the local church over which they are called to be overseers.
3. Here is the pattern: these men are called to provide leadership and oversight in their own local church for the purpose of care. They are not businessmen, nor managers of employees. They are caring for the spiritual needs of a specific group of people just as a shepherd cares for, nourishes and protects a flock of sheep.

## **Conclusion**

Covenant Life Church will never be a perfect church. And there is no form of church government that is infallible. But we should care about and pay close attention to the design laid out in Scripture. Because we believe in the authority of God's Word, because we believe the church belongs to Him, and because we want to adorn the gospel, we want to strive for biblical faithfulness in how the church is led and governed.

## **Fellowship Starters**

1. Take time as a care group to read Acts 20:17-38. (This will help establish the context into which Paul is speaking.)
2. How did you initially respond to the announcement of a series on church governance (or church polity)?
3. Why should we care about the right governance and well-being of the church? What happens when governance (or polity) is marginalized or ignored?
4. Prior to this message, what was your view of the governance of the local church? What did you learn? How was your thinking adjusted or clarified?
5. How can you adorn the gospel in the way you participate in the structures of the church and in the way you follow those called to lead?
6. How can a right governance structure bless and serve God's people? How can bad polity be detrimental to the church?

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