

A Scripturally Unorganized Church 03-21-21

It is often described that in regards to church authority and organization, churches as being one of four types:

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Scripturally organized	Having qualified members serving as elders, deacons and evangelist(s)	Philippi
Scripturally unorganized	Not having qualified members serving as elders, deacons or evangelist , but working towards filling some or all of these works	Corinth
Unscripturally organized	Having unqualified members serving as elders, deacons and evangelist(s)	Diotrephes
Unscripturally unorganized	Not having qualified members serving as elders, deacons or evangelist , and not working towards filling some or all of these works, or having another structure in place	Thyatira

Our intention is to examine the type of congregation we have recently become, the Scripturally Unorganized congregation. Our eldership was recently dissolved when one of the overseers was no longer qualified to serve in that role. Because the Scriptures require those who serve to be totally qualified to be called, this one stepped down. Because the example of Scripture is that it is a plurality of men to serve as bishop in a congregation, the remaining bishop then stepped down. Because there is no example of deacons serving without elders present, the deacons then stepped down, dissolving the deaconship. There are examples of congregations with evangelists and no elders (Titus 1), so the evangelist did not step down. Finally, since there cannot be a congregation without teachers, none of our teachers stepped down (1 Timothy 1).

Corinth has been cited as an example of a congregation that was scripturally unorganized. We see in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians that the church in Corinth struggled with many issues. Fortunately, they corrected many of these problems. But there is an important point to be seen in this: members needed to step up in the generic work of oversight in the congregation. We too need to consider from Corinth's letter how to behave.

First of all, Paul described their congregation as needing leadership from the "wise men among you" in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. The term for this type of leadership is "*noocracy*"; it means a rule of the wisest/most spiritual. In Titus 2 Paul commended to Titus the importance of older/more mature brothers and sisters as being the leaders of a congregation. Perhaps the big lesson here is not what the unorganized church is, but what it is not: an unorganized church is NOT a democracy. It does not vote for decisions, as such behavior makes the wise and spiritual equal in authority to the least wise and spiritual.

Second of all, while the church in Corinth had no overseers, that did not excuse them from pursuing as a congregation their soundness. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 Paul directed the Corinthian

church members to “*put away from yourselves the evil person*”. This was a work of the entire congregation in the absence of the overseers. We see this in Revelation 2:14 pertaining to sound doctrine and in Revelation 2:20 pertaining to sound membership. Members are responsible for soundness in doctrine and in membership. In a Scripturally unorganized church the members need to ascertain truth is taught, to promote purity in members, and to reach out and admonish the unruly.

Third, in a scripturally unorganized congregation it is important that we are mindful of one another even more intently. 1 Corinthians 8:4-8 and 10:24 reminds us that we should “Let no one seek his own”. Without shepherds the danger of causing others to stumble increases. Instead, we need to be using liberty to serve each other. Members need to think more about others than ever before, and make choices that benefit all.

Finally, a scripturally unorganized congregation needs to focus on NOT being a scripturally unorganized congregation. Meaning, they need to work towards “*set in order the things that are lacking*” (1 Corinthians 16:10-12, Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3). How do we do this? First, members of the church compel themselves to grow into serving in these works. Second, they encourage others to do the same.

Scriptures give us examples of scripturally unorganized churches that succeed, such as (presumably) Smyrna (Rev. 2) or Philadelphia (Rev. 3). We can be certain that if indeed these are scripturally unorganized congregations, they succeeded because members rose to the opportunity.