

CONGREGATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Under the Lordship of Christ (Part 22 – series on Baptist Distinctives)

TEXT: Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 11:22

INTRODUCTION: Some organization is necessary in any church. Otherwise there would be pure chaos. God's Word declares "*let all things be done decently and in order*" (1 Cor. 14:40). There must be some kind of acknowledged leadership structure. Certain issues must be addressed. Who owns the property? Who spends the money? Who initiates ministry? Who determines doctrine? Who enforces church discipline?

There are four basic types of polity for all organized churches:

- 1) Papal. This is when one man rules the church as in Roman Catholicism. The pope is regarded as the "vicar of Christ," His personal representative on earth.
- 2) Episcopal. This form of church government is rule by bishops, who have the oversight of churches and appoint pastors.
- 3) Presbyterian. This is rule by elders. A distinction is made between teaching elders and ruling elders.
- 4) Congregational. This is the form of church government in which all basic and major decisions are made by the majority of the members of the church. Baptists, historically, have used this form.

OUTLINE: What must we understand about congregational church government to be convinced that it is the most scriptural type?

I. The Explanation of it

- A. Autonomy
- B. Independence
- C. Authority

II. The Exclusions of it (the unbiblical forms)

- A. Papal
- B. Episcopal
- C. Presbyterian

III. The Examples of it (in the Bible)

- A. The replacement of Judas (Acts 1:26)
- B. The first church council (Acts 15:22)
- C. Church discipline (1 Cor. 5:4)
- D. The sending of missionaries and holding accountable (Acts 11:22; 13:1-4; 14:27)

IV. The Explosion of the Myth of Elder Rule

CONCLUSION: To any thoughtful, unprejudiced mind, it is clear that the New Testament pattern is that each local congregation is responsible to manage its own affairs under the lordship of Christ.