

Seeking to Apply God's Word to Our Lives

Biblical Leadership and Ministry Organizations

Note: The following paper is the second in a two-part series on biblical leadership. Please read part one "Biblical Leadership and the Local Church" before reading this paper.

During the past 200 years, ministry organizations have emerged claiming to be established by God for evangelism and the equipping of believers. These organizations include Bible schools, missionary societies, counseling ministries, evangelistic associations, student ministries, sponsored Bible studies, TV and radio ministries. Because most of these organizations interact with believers in local churches, they adopted the term "parachurch" to describe their ministry.ⁱ Has God raised up these organizations to minister alongside the local church? What biblical authority do individuals have to create their own ministry organizations? These questions will be answered in this paper.

A Comparison between Ministry Organizations and the Word of God

God's Word fully equips us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17).ⁱⁱ God prepared these good works beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, to evaluate the validity of ministry organizations, we must compare them to the Word of God in regards to their authority, structure, and responsibilities.

Ministry Organizations

The Word of God

Authority:

Ministry organizations operate under the belief that God gives individuals the authority to create institutions of ministry outside the local church.

Biblical leadership is founded upon the authority of God's Word. God created the local church as the only institution of ministry for the body of Christ. Local churches are led by elders who were appointed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). These elders are commanded to shepherd and oversee the flock allotted to their charge (1 Peter 5:2-3). Elders were given by God for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (Ephesians 4:11). God commands every believer to be actively involved in a local church, and place themselves under the God-given authority of its elders (Hebrews 10:24-25, 13:17).

Structure:

Ministry organizations operate under the belief that God has appointed their leadership structure. They follow man-made business models that include positions such as founder, CEO, president, board of directors, and regional managers.

The only leadership structure that God has appointed for the body of Christ are elders within the local church.ⁱⁱⁱ Local churches are led by a plurality of elders with equal standing and specific character qualifications (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Elders are held accountable by their fellow elders, the congregation, and Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 5:19-20; Hebrews 13:17).

Responsibilities:

Ministry organizations operate under the belief that they can take upon themselves the responsibility to equip, oversee, and shepherd believers from the flocks of local churches.

Elders within the local church are commanded by God to shepherd the flock among them (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). They are to oversee the flock allotted to their charge (1 Peter 5:3) and equip the congregation for the work of service (Ephesians 4:11-12). Nowhere in the New Testament do you find elder(s) of one flock having the authority to shepherd, oversee, or equip members of another flock. This practice would invalidate God's leadership principles involving: (1) The Holy Spirit's appointment of elders within each local church to shepherd and oversee the flock (Acts 20:28). (2) God's command for elders to shepherd the flock "among you" (1 Peter 5:2). (3) The personal accountability of elders by fellow elders and the congregation (1 Timothy 5:19-20).^{iv}

Conclusion:

Elders, within each local church, are appointed by the Holy Spirit. They are to follow the leadership structure clearly set forth in God's Word. They have biblical authority to equip, oversee, and shepherd the flock that God has placed in their charge.

Conversely, ministry organizations are institutions created by man. They operate under a man-made leadership structure. They lack biblical authority to equip, oversee, and shepherd members within flocks of local churches. For these reasons, it is clear that God has not raised up these institutions.

We rejoice that God's Word, having gone forth through various ministry organizations, has resulted in spiritual growth amongst some believers. However, a ministry is not validated by its fruitfulness, but by the Word of God.^v

As shepherds, we do not have authority to delegate our shepherding, overseeing, or equipping responsibilities to individuals or organizations outside our church. Therefore, we cannot refer individuals to organizations such as Christian counselors, Bible schools, mission organizations, or student ministries. We cannot endorse programs such as marriage counseling seminars, evangelistic outreaches, sponsored Bible studies, or Christian concerts.

As shepherds, we do not have authority to refer our people to outside printed materials that seek to equip, oversee, or shepherd our flock. With regard to outside printed materials used in our children's Sunday school classes, we acknowledge we have fallen short of our God-given shepherding responsibilities. Our future goal is to develop our own materials through gifted individuals within our congregation.

“Seeking to Apply God's Word to Our Lives” papers represent an overview of various Bible doctrines. Each paper contains biblical truths that often set TVBC apart from other churches and religious organizations. We invite the congregation's biblically based feedback as we seek to accurately handle the Word of God.

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- ⁱ The term “parachurch” is a non-biblical term that was coined from the Greek word “para” which means “by the side of” and the English word “church.” Individuals have defined the term parachurch as organizations that come alongside the local church.
- ⁱⁱ In 2 Timothy 3:17, the word “*equips*” is better translated “fully equips.”
- ⁱⁱⁱ The only other leadership structure that once existed within local churches were the apostles, prophets, and evangelists (Ephesians 4:11-12). Apostles and prophets were provisional, being the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Evangelists played a limited role in the early church (for further discussion see the paper entitled “Evangelism”).
- ^{iv} The only individuals that once had authority to shepherd, oversee, and equip believers in multiple churches were the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and those under the apostle's authority (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; Titus 3:12). Once the era of the apostles, prophets, and evangelists ended (Ephesians 2:20), this practice ceased.
- ^v In Philippians 1:12-18, the Apostle Paul rejoiced that the brethren in Rome were preaching Christ. Some of them were preaching Christ out of love. Others were preaching Christ from selfish motives seeking to cause Paul harm. In this passage, we see fruitfulness of God's Word (i.e. people coming to know Jesus Christ) can occur regardless of a person's motive. A ministry is not validated by its fruitfulness, but by the Word of God.