

# LESSON 3 Churches That Govern Themselves

---

David and John were happy to talk about the results of their work at Gane. “Brother Eyo,” David began, “We have eighteen new believers, but we are not sure what to do now. We have been leading all the meetings, and the people always want us to make all the plans. We think it is time the people begin to make plans about doing the work of God. What do you think?”

“I think God is giving you both good counsel concerning the new believers at Gane,” said Brother Eyo. “Let us discuss some important things about good local church government.”

When a group of people has responded to the gospel and become believers in Christ, the next important step is to bring them into the body of Christ in the form of a local church. This lesson will discuss the principles of forming a local church that is able to govern itself and continue to grow and fulfill its ministry of evangelism and teaching.

## ***lesson outline***

---

The Importance of Self-Government

The Activities of Self-Government

The Responsibilities of Self-Government

## ***lesson objectives***

---

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. Explain why self-government should be developed in a local church from its beginning.
2. Identify steps that will enable new believers to prepare themselves for the self-government of their local church.
3. Identify purposes of various business functions as suggested for a self-governing church.
4. State biblical principles regarding corrective discipline in the church body.

## ***learning activities***

---

1. Study the lesson following the procedure given in Lesson 1. Be sure to read all Scripture texts given in the lesson, and answer each study question before checking the answer.
2. Take the self-test at the end of the lesson and check your answers.

## ***key words***

---

advisory	discipline	recognition
blatant	elder	responsibility
by-laws	leadership	self-governing
commitment	management	self-propagating
conduct	maturity	self-supporting
constitution	minutes	suspend
decision	parliamentary rules	

## ***lesson development***

---

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT**

**Objective 1.** *Explain why self-government should be developed in a local church from its beginning.*

When a new church is planted, there are three basic goals which will help the church planter establish a new church. The new church should work to be self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. If any one of these goals is neglected, the church may not grow successfully. In some areas, churches that achieve these goals are called self-reliant or indigenous churches.

#### **The First Step**

Even though the goal of self-government may be the most difficult to achieve, it is very important. The long-term life of the church really depends on it. The spiritual responsibility that is necessary to accomplish the goals of self-propagation and self-support will not be possible without the foundation of self-government. If new converts do not develop a sense of responsibility for self-government, there may be little or no spiritual growth. The new church probably will welcome the church planter's leadership in the beginning, but like a growing child, so it will want and need independence.

It is wise for the church planter to recognize and work with the need with right timing, or discontentment may come into the church. This and divisions in the church can be prevented if plans for self-government are made from the beginning and implemented as soon as possible.

In an area where the Christian message is new to the culture, the church planter may assume that the new believers are not capable of governing their own church. He may feel he must continue to supervise the growing church. However, in every society, no matter how primitive, people have a form of local government and can understand levels of authority. Even without the benefit of formal education, people have the common sense to realize some form of leadership is needed

and useful. How much more, then, will believers who have the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit be able to administer the work of their church.

How a new church begins is the way it may tend to continue. If the first believers are allowed to depend heavily upon the church planter to make decisions about the church, the new believers may continue to depend upon the one who led them to the Lord. The new Christians will need help and guidance, but it must be guidance in making their own decisions in relation to the governing of their church.

## Self-Governing Churches Gain Maturity

How did the apostle Paul establish churches? He did not go out merely to bring sinners to conversion. Paul did not establish “outstations” or “missions.” He went out to establish churches that could continue to carry the gospel message throughout their region. He founded the church in centers where local leaders continued the work. We read in Acts that in places where the apostles preached they were followed by many others that taught and preached the Word of the Lord (Acts 15:35). When Paul returned to visit the churches he had founded, “the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” (Acts 16:5).

The Scriptures do not give details on how these churches were governed or the procedures used to establish a church organization. In this lesson we will discuss those teachings given in Scripture about the offices and responsibilities in the church. How government has been developed in the church will be discussed from the experience of those who have successfully planted churches in various parts of the world. Their suggestions can give you guidelines for adapting methods that can be useful in your area.

Just as a child matures more adequately if given responsibility, so will a new church. A wise church planter teaches the new group about the functions and purpose of the church. He teaches from the Word about the blessing and necessity of meeting and worshipping together, about the importance of studying God’s Word, and what it means to be part of the body of Christ. Careful and patient teaching will give direction to the new believers on

decisions that can best be made by them. There are many which can be made best by the believers because they know their own community. For instance, where, when, and how often should the new believers meet together? How many of these meetings should be for prayer and worship? How many should be for teaching? What time of the day or evening should the meetings be? In many communities the church has a worship service on Sunday morning and Sunday evening. In some cities however, the only time the believers can meet is on Sunday afternoon. All these decisions can be made by the new believers themselves. Making these decisions will help to develop their growing sense of responsibility. They will become active in those meetings which they have decided are the most necessary. The role of the church planter is to teach related portions of Scripture that will give guidance in helping the new church make decisions.

By making their own decisions, new believers learn to value the opinions and spiritual maturity of certain ones in their own group. As these leaders mature in their abilities, the local church is better able to govern itself. Having confidence in their own leaders can help promote unity within the body of believers. By making its own decisions, the church has an opportunity to assume responsibility in handling its own affairs, and believers can determine how they can best serve God.

## ***Application***

---

**1** Certain tasks are involved in the early development of self-government in the church. Write 1) in front of those that may best be done by the new believers, and 2) if by the church planter.

- ... **a** Select the meeting place
- ... **b** Decide on the hours for services
- ... **c** Teach the necessity of worship and Bible study
- ... **d** Decide the frequency and type of services
- ... **e** Explain the significance of the body of Christ
- ... **f** Conduct the first Bible studies

- 2** Circle the letter in front of each TRUE statement of why self-government is needed in a local church from its beginning.
- a)** Self-government is a necessary part of the foundation for self-propagation and self-support.
  - b)** Taking the responsibilities of self-government aids in developing the spiritual maturity of the believers.
  - c)** Self-government is primarily needed to prevent foreign cultural influences.
  - d)** Early self-government may help to prevent discontent among able local leaders.
  - e)** The first purpose of self-government is to eliminate unqualified leaders.
  - f)** Relying on the ability of leaders from within their own group can promote unity in the church.
- 

## THE ACTIVITIES OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

### Acceptance of Standards

**Objective 2.** *Identify steps that will enable new believers to prepare themselves for the self-government of their local church.*

As he gathers a group of new converts together, the church planter becomes a teacher to instruct the new believers in the doctrines of the Christian faith. One of the purposes of the teaching is to help the believers form themselves into a local church. What steps can the church planter follow that will help the group become an established, self-governing local church?

First, the converts need teaching that will bring them to an understanding that the Christian faith is founded on the Scripture. The teaching in 1 Peter 3:15 points out the importance of believers having their faith founded in God's Word: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." As the believers understand the doctrines and apply the teaching, they can begin to work together to fulfill the purpose of the church.

Furthermore, it is especially important that biblical standards become the believers' own standards for conduct and beliefs. It is not sufficient that they learn a statement of doctrine with a list of Scripture references, or a set of rules. New believers need patient teaching so that they will understand scriptural requirements and apply the teaching. The teaching may require considerable time, depending on their needs, until the standards become their own convictions. If it is to be their church, it must be their standards.

As the believers can express their own convictions of Christian belief, they have a basis for fellowship in the church. For a true church to be formed, there needs to be a standard of doctrine and conduct accepted in common by the believers.

Everywhere in the world today there are false teachers; so it is not enough to say that the basis for our fellowship is the Bible alone. Many false cults make the same claim. To be able to work together as part of the body of Christ, the church needs to be in agreement on certain fundamental standards of fellowship (1 Corinthians 1:10). For instance, it usually is a normal requirement that a person be born again before he or she can become a member. And the believer must live in a way that indicates a new life in Christ. Depending on the cultural background of the area, the believers may come to other agreements based on their guidance from Scripture.

As the church planter is helping the new believers to form their church, there may be certain cultural problems that confront them. Many of these can be serious problems which may require long discussions and patient teaching to help the believers agree on biblical standards of handling the problems. For example, in some societies are marriage customs that do not conform to Christian teaching; in other places such things as cheating on taxes, stealing, and bribery are socially acceptable practices. In other countries there are legal or social restrictions against Christianity. Dealing with such difficult problems requires sincere prayer and faithful seeking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. When the believers themselves know the leading of the Holy Spirit in these difficult matters, they are better able to uphold their standards of belief and conduct.

## **Application**

---

**3** From the foregoing discussion we learn that new converts can be helped to form a self-governing church as they are brought to

- a)** an understanding that Christian life is based on Scripture.
- b)** acceptance of scriptural standards as their own concept of conduct and belief.
- c)** agreement on points of fundamental doctrine as a basis of fellowship in the church body.
- d)** all of the above.

**4** (Circle the letter in front of the correct completions.)

Agreement on standards is necessary for a new church because the agreement will

- a)** form a basis of church government and fellowship.
- b)** give the church planter rules for discipline.
- c)** be a help to understand Scripture and prevent error.
- d)** help the believers relate doctrine to their daily lives.

**5** The church planter can assist the church to build a firm foundation for self-government by

- a)** guiding believers to an understanding of scriptural teachings which will become their own standards for Christian life.
- b)** having believers memorize scriptural standards which teach the rules of the church.

---

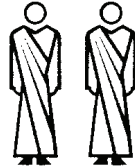
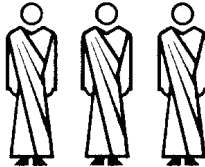
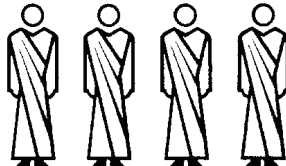


## **Organizing the Church**

In the book of Acts and in Paul's letters to the churches, we are not given specific details regarding the organization of church government. Paul's letters give the requirements and responsibilities for leadership positions in the church, referring to them as elders, overseers (bishops), and deacons. Elder was a title used in the Jewish temple (Acts 4:23), so it was a position of authority familiar to the Jewish Christians. This title was frequently used to indicate Christian leaders in the book of Acts. It is apparent that the elders had pastoral and administrative positions. The elders worked with the apostles in the important decisions made at the Jerusalem council



(Acts 15). Paul reminded Timothy to “not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Timothy 4:14). Another position mentioned, that of overseer, seemed to include a number of the same responsibilities as an elder, and in some references the titles seem to be used interchangeably. Acts 20:17 says that Paul sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus, and in his farewell to them he admonished them to guard themselves and their flock (v. 28). To Titus Paul wrote, “an overseer is entrusted with God’s work” (Titus 1:7), and “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message . . . so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine” (v. 9). Deacons apparently had a helping ministry, perhaps as assistants to the elders and overseers (Acts 6:1–4). Paul addressed his letter to the Philippians to “the saints . . . together with the overseers and deacons” (Philippians 1:1) indicating that while these were separate positions, the various offices worked together. Deacons were required to be men of mature spiritual quality (1 Timothy 3:8). We will discuss more about the qualifications and responsibilities of church leaders in Lesson 6.

**APOSTLES****ELDERS OR OVERSEERS****DEACONS**


---

**LEADERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

The qualities required of those responsible for the government of the church are stated in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1–8; Titus 1:6–9), but how the work was to be done is not specifically given. Perhaps from this we can learn that the Holy Spirit intended that as the church grew throughout the various cultures, qualified people would lead in matters of church government according to the needs and circumstances of their time and culture.

In the following discussion we will consider some of the organizational responsibilities of self-government that has been, and is being, done in evangelical churches in various countries. These are suggestions that may guide you and may be adapted to meet the particular needs of your area.

## Decisions on Membership

The strength of each local church is in its membership. Faithful, well instructed believers will normally produce an active, faithful, growing local church. As the church planter teaches believers the principles of Christian living, he can expect that they will show the fruit of a Christian life. One of the first tasks of organizing the church usually is that the church decides the requirements for water baptism and membership.

Some church planters have followed the practice that if a church is planted in an area new to the Christian faith, they ask an experienced pastor from a neighboring area to assist them in examining the first several candidates for baptism. They feel that this prevents new believers from having the impression that the church planter is solely responsible for such decisions. Then, as soon as a sufficient number is qualified for membership, a committee of at least three members is selected to serve with the church planter as an examining committee to approve candidates for water baptism and membership of other new believers. It is helpful that this committee be formed as soon as the first members are accepted into the new church. Those serving on the committee usually know the lives of those applying for baptism and membership; consequently, their

decisions are more acceptable to the new converts than if the church planter tried to make the decision alone.

## Preparing Leaders in the Church

Can a new church produce qualified leaders to work within the church? If it is to be truly self-governing, obviously the leadership must come from among the body of believers. The church planter's goal is to build a self-governing church. So from the first group of converts he is alert to recognize those who show leadership qualities. He can begin a plan of training for them, and usually people who are potential leaders are eager to accept responsibility. The process and methods of training leaders for work in the church will be discussed further in Lesson 6.

From the record in Acts we see that it was Paul's method to train leaders in the local area. He ministered for an extended period of time in the strategic centers, leaving trained leaders to continue to minister in an established church. Then he went on to minister in another place. He visited the churches in the province again after an interval of a few months and in some cases it was three years before his next visit. The record of Acts 16:4–5 tells us that, "they traveled from town to town . . . the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers." In his letter to Timothy, Paul admonishes, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). The letters Paul wrote were to established, self-governing churches.

## Selecting a Pastor

Once there is a group of members in the new church, the next step is to select a pastor. If the church planter has made his home where the church is located, usually the members want him to be the pastor. Since it may be already assumed that the church planter should be the pastor, some may question why it is necessary to select him as pastor. Sometime in the future the church will need to select a new pastor; therefore, it

is helpful for the new church to have the opportunity to learn the process by selecting their first pastor. How the believers go about deciding on a pastor will probably depend on the local customs of selecting leadership. In some churches, members meet together and come to a mutual agreement that they will invite a given person to be their pastor. Other groups prefer to vote, and the majority makes the decision. However it is done, the important matter is that the believers agree to work together with their pastor to accomplish God's purpose for the church.

## Boards and Committees

As the church grows and its members become more mature in the matters of conducting the church, they may find it helpful to choose different boards and committees to direct the ministries of the church. In this way, many groups have found that responsibilities of the church can be shared among the members. We have already discussed the membership committee. There are two other administrative groups that many churches have found to be helpful in the church.

1. Advisory committee: This group may be called by other titles in different areas. Some groups have found that in the beginning the new church may not have enough qualified people to form a board of deacons or elders. In such cases, they select a committee to work with the pastor in the church. There may be times when the pastor has to be away from the church, or in some cases, one person may have to pastor more than one church in an area of rapid growth. The advisory committee serves to assist the pastor so the new works are not left without leadership.

2. The church board: The qualifications for elders and deacons are given in 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and in Titus 1:5–9. By whatever title the church leaders are called, these verses list their qualifications. Many churches refer to the leaders who assist the pastor as deacons, although in this present time, their work is more like that of the New Testament elders. They usually have some spiritual ministry as well as assisting with the general business of the church. In some places, it is

the practice to elect three deacons when the church board is first organized, then add another deacon for every fifty new members up to the number of nine board members. Usually the pastor serves as chairman of the board, and the whole group works together as a church council. If the pastor has to be away, the senior board member may be in charge of the church activities. There may be a second and third deacon appointed who also may be in charge if necessary. With this sort of plan, there is no question about leadership, and the ministry of the church can continue smoothly in the absence of the pastor.

How the church is governed usually depends on the type of government the people are familiar with in their culture. Some work best with a system in which all have a voice. In that case, decisions are made by voting or some other form of gaining agreement among the members. Others are accustomed to have one leader they recognize. They trust him to select those who will work with him. One precedent we can learn from Scripture, however, is that “one man rule” is not the biblical pattern. Acts 15 records a church council where important decisions were made. The apostles were the early church leaders, but they worked together with elders of the churches (Acts 15:6, 22). Proverbs 15:22 advises, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.”

Obviously, a large church with thousands of members will need more committees, boards, or councils, than a small, new church of 50 or 100 members. Whatever the number, or by whatever name the group is called, we must keep the main purpose in mind. That is, groups work together with the pastor to accomplish the work of the church. They meet to discuss problems confronting the church, to handle business and financial matters, to pray, to counsel one another, to make plans for expansion and future ministries of the church. Their underlying purpose is to do whatever they can to guide the church to win the lost and advance the kingdom of God.

**Application**

---

**6** Match the self-government activity (left) with the person or group primarily responsible (right).

- |   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| ... <b>a</b> Prepares church leaders  | 1) The membership committee |
| ... <b>b</b> Selects the pastor   | 2) The church planter       |
| ... <b>c</b> Serves the church, assists the pastor with the work of the church      | 3) The church body          |
| ... <b>d</b> Approves candidates for church membership                              | 4) The advisory committee   |
| ... <b>e</b> Plans for expansion and future ministries                              | 5) The church body          |
| ... <b>f</b> Assists church planter with church activities early in its development |                             |

**7** Based on our discussion of church organization, complete the following statements.

- a)** Scripture tells us the spiritual requirements of those responsible for church government, but not how to govern. We can assume the reason is .....
- b)** It is a wise practice that local believers serve with the church planter on a membership committee because .....
- c)** How the church selects who shall be the pastor usually depends on .....
- d)** To be called a self-governing church, the leadership comes from .....
- e)** The main purpose of a church board (or council) is to .....



## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

### Business Sessions

**Objective 3.** *Identify purposes of various business functions as suggested for a self-governing church.*

To carry out the responsibilities of self-government, most churches find it necessary to hold church business meetings. If the idea of business meetings is new to the people, the congregation may need some instruction on parliamentary procedure. If it is completely new to the congregation, the pastor, or church planter, need not be insistent on following all the rules; however, he should give some basic guides. By his teaching and example he can show the church body that following certain procedures can help accomplish business, aid unity, and prevent angry expressions and useless discussions.

### Church Board Meetings

Many church boards follow the practice of having a meeting once a month and calling special meetings whenever necessary. They hold a regular monthly meeting and if there is no business to discuss they use the time to together, have fellowship or have a short Bible study together. This helps them maintain a good working relationship.

To ensure that the board meeting goes more efficiently, it is helpful that the pastor, as chairman of the board, bring a prepared agenda. Any of the board members can feel free to add any items they wish. Most boards find it useful to appoint one member to record all decisions and to keep the minutes with the church records. The usual purpose of board meetings is to discuss and plan management of church finances, plans for building, or gathering information and making plans for changes or expansion of the church ministries. They can prepare reports that give the needs or the accomplishments of the various ministries and present these reports to the church body. The board facilitates the ministry of the church when some new project or ministry is planned. The board can decide how to go about gathering information and making plans and decisions, which then can be presented to the church body for approval.

## Church Business Meetings

As a church grows and expands its ministries, it usually is necessary to have a church business meeting at least once a year, or whenever the church decides a meeting is needed. This is a meeting for all the members to attend, and all can participate in the meeting. This is usually a time when the church body hears financial reports and reports about the ministries of the church. It may be a time to receive new members, to hear plans or decisions made by the board, and to express approval or disapproval of such plans and decisions. Some churches hold a business meeting to elect or confirm a new pastor. These meetings are important to a church and to each of its members. They give the church body an opportunity to be informed about the church to participate in decisions, in ministry, and to take responsibility. This promotes a feeling of responsibility for the ministries and a bond of unity in the church.

## Adopting a Church Constitution

Sometimes a church body decides that it would like to have its agreements on how the church is to be governed and its decisions regulating standards of fellowship documented in written form. This is usually done in the form of a church constitution. The constitution states the church's understanding on important biblical doctrines and outlines the qualifications for water baptism and church membership. It can include whatever the church members feel needs to be kept in written form. In some countries the national government requires the church to adopt a constitution before it can be officially recognized. This may be important in some areas to allow marriages to be performed in the church or to allow the church to have some representation to the government in case it should ever be necessary.

If there is a national church organization, often it will recommend a model constitution for new churches to follow. The main purpose for a constitution is to provide a basis for fellowship and to promote unity in the work of God. Having



a written standard of doctrine and conduct can help to prevent errors in doctrine that may arise at a later time, as well as strengthening the church in having a unified purpose.

## Official Recognition

If there is a national church organization, the new church can be officially recognized as part of the fellowship. Usually this is a joy and blessing to a new congregation—to experience the blessing of being part of a larger fellowship. In many areas, especially rural, a highlight of the year is when many churches of an area gather for an annual convention. The believers have opportunities for wider ministry and know the joy of working together with other congregations to spread the gospel. Many new believers have been greatly encouraged to learn that they are not alone, but part of the worldwide church.

## *Application*

---

**8** The business functions of the church are needed to accomplish certain purposes. Based on our discussion, match the function (right) with its purpose (left).

- |  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| ... <b>a</b> Provides opportunity for wider ministry and experience of fellowship in a larger body           | 1) Church business meeting |
| ... <b>b</b> Enables the church body to be informed of ministries, encourages responsibility, promotes unity | 2) Board meetings          |
| ... <b>c</b> Plans and facilitates ministry of church, records and reports finances, does expansion planning | 3) Official recognition    |
| ... <b>d</b> Provides a statement of doctrine, a standard for membership, helps prevent doctrinal error      | 4) Adopting a constitution |



## The Responsibility of Discipline

**Objective 4.** *State biblical principles regarding corrective discipline in the church body.*

One of the most difficult and unpleasant tasks facing church leaders is that of properly administering corrective discipline. When an individual identifies himself as a Christian brother, then there is a certain expectation by the church that his behavior will be conformed to the biblical standards of Christian living. Knowing how and when to confront a church member in a disciplinary way requires wisdom and the proper attitude and motive on the part of the leadership of the church.

The proper attitude and motivation for discipline is one of genuine care and concern for the offending party and for the church fellowship as a whole. Leaders cannot effectively lead erring members to repentance if they act critically or project the idea that they do not have the brother's true interests at heart. The goal of discipline is restoration through repentance. Anything which does not effectively lead toward that goal should be avoided.

Discipline should have a solid biblical basis for determining right and wrong behaviors. The seriousness of the offense is a factor in knowing how to deal with the problem. Paul was faced with the issue of blatant immorality in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 5) and directed the church to show an open rejection of that sinful act since it was hurting the entire church reputation. The sinning man was to be expelled from the congregation, turned over to Satan for his sinful nature to be confronted, and eventually brought back into fellowship with the church after repentance (2 Corinthians 2:5–11).

However, Paul had to deal with other issues of discipline which were not considered to be of such moral harm to either the offending parties or to the church body. The church leaders in Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians 3:6–13) asked Paul how to discipline people who would not work in order to earn their own livelihood and had become troublesome gossips and busybodies. Rather than expel them from the congregation, Paul urged that they be

confronted with their irresponsible behavior and requested to settle down and find a job, rather than become an undue burden on others.

Discipline is an issue for the church and not only for the pastor. There may be minor issues that a loving pastoral visit can resolve; however, the pastor must be wise to restore the individual. Issues which involve the entire church may not be handled as privately as the pastoral visit. In this case the pastor needs the open support of other leaders and the congregation. Upon thoroughly investigating the charges against a church member, if it is found by the pastor that the charges are true, then collectively the pastor and church leaders should confront the offending party to resolve the issue (Matthew 18:15–17). The offending brother or sister should be able to see clearly from the Scripture that he or she is sinning against God, and that the church leaders are concerned with keeping that person in fellowship with God through obedience. These issues include such things as people who spread false doctrines, troublemakers, and those involved in immoral practices (Titus 1:10–13).

The primary motive behind discipline is to restore the offending brother after sincere repentance. Discipline need not be destructive; rather, with the proper attitude on the part of the leaders, discipline can be a very positive part of the growth and development of the individual and the group. When someone has repented of a sin which is of public concern to the church, it may be necessary for the repentant member to show the others the sincere nature of that repentance. A brief, but sufficient, time of proving one's self to the others that he has truly changed inwardly and seeks to be restored to fellowship may be required of that brother. The offending, but repentant, brother should find a loving and caring attitude being expressed to him from the church leaders and other members of the church. Galatians 6:1–2 teaches, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently . . . Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Jesus confronted Peter after Peter lied about knowing Jesus (John 18:15–27; 21:15–19). Peter had failed his Lord, his group, and himself. Jesus waited for the right moment before approaching Peter about the issue. With great wisdom, He gently began to restore Peter by questioning him about his love

and commitment. In the end, Jesus resolved the issue, restored Peter's dignity, and let him know that he had an important role in the ministry of the church.

Jesus' example teaches the important issues of discipline. There needs to be proper understanding of the offense. With the right attitude and motive, Jesus waited for the right time to approach Peter. Jesus allowed the failure to speak to Peter rather than bringing up all the charges. The questions Jesus asked forced Peter to examine his love for the person of his Lord rather than explain why he had failed. Jesus tenderly gave Peter his self-esteem back by assigning him a role which let Peter know he was important and needed.

### ***Application***

---

- 9** Circle the letter of each TRUE statement of biblical principles regarding corrective discipline in the church body.
- a)** The primary motive for corrective discipline must be love and concern for the offending one and for the church as a whole.
  - b)** Expectations of Christian behavior must be based clearly on scriptural teachings.
  - c)** According to the Corinthian letter, the only method of discipline for the sinning member was expulsion from the congregation.
  - d)** The primary goal of corrective discipline is to cause repentance and bring restoration to Christ and fellowship in the body of Christ.
  - e)** The church body as a whole has a responsibility to deal with sin in the church in order to correct the problem and its cause.
  - f)** When a member has repented and is restored to the church body, he should not be given spiritual ministry since he may fail again.
  - g)** Helping the offending member clearly understand from Scripture that he has sinned against God is a step toward restoration.
  - h)** Discipline with the right attitude promotes spiritual maturity in the individual disciplined and the church as a whole.

**10** Read John 21:15–19 again. In these verses Jesus shows an attitude of love and care in corrective discipline. What is the most important goal of corrective discipline demonstrated when Jesus said, “Feed my lambs . . . Take care of my sheep . . . Feed my sheep”?

.....

.....

.....

.....

---

## Growth in Spiritual Maturity

We have discussed previously in this lesson that a church that is able to assume the responsibilities of self-government is becoming spiritually mature. The church that is gaining spiritual maturity is blessed as a whole, and also each member is blessed by the opportunity to grow spiritually.

Those members who take the responsibility to be teachers, or serve on committees, or as board members can share the blessing of working together in the work of God. At first, they will probably need guidance and teaching from the pastor on the importance of prayer and seeking God’s guidance in the work they have to do. There may be some who need help in learning to work cooperatively. As they form habits of seeking God’s guidance in church work, they have the opportunity to learn to pray about all phases of their lives. Learning the importance of waiting on God in prayer is an important step in spiritual growth.

A self-governing church is able to develop a pattern of leadership from within the congregation. When the church has elders or deacons from within its own membership, the members can have the assurance of a continuity of leadership. If the pastor is called away or must leave unexpectedly, the church will not be left to flounder without a leader. The work of the church can continue while awaiting the return of a pastor.

When a new believer experiences the joy of salvation, usually his first reaction is to tell others. The wise church planter or

pastor will channel this joyful zeal with Bible teaching and help the new believers learn to teach and witness to others. As the believers take the responsibility of teaching in the church and witnessing to those around them, they need to learn the value of studying the Word of God. As they are properly taught, their love for the Word will grow. They will learn the necessity and blessing of regular Bible study. Members who are well grounded in Bible teaching help one another and contribute much to the spiritual maturity of the church.

Maturing churches, like individual maturing Christians, are not only concerned with themselves but also with developing a loving concern for the souls of the lost around them. The result is a desire to share the good news with those who have not heard the gospel. The church planter's aim is not only a self-governing church just for the sake of building a self-reliant church, but also to establish a body of maturing Christians who are able to carry out the purpose of the church in evangelism and building up the body of Christ.

### ***Application***

---

**11** Circle the letter in front of each TRUE statement concerning benefits a self-governing church may provide to individual members.

- a)** A member who feels responsible for the functioning of the church (such as a board member) is likely to become more involved in prayer and intercession for God's guidance.
  - b)** Those involved in leadership functions will devote themselves only to the Lord and will withdraw from contact with people.
  - c)** Members who feel responsible for teaching and witnessing recognize the need for and blessing of regular Bible study.
  - d)** Promotion of individuals with natural leadership is the primary purpose of self-government.
  - e)** Self-government responsibilities help to assure the congregation of continuity in church leadership.
-

**self-test**

---

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Circle the letter in front of the best answer to each question.

- 1** The goal of church self-government is to
  - a)** prevent foreign influence.
  - b)** promote national pride.
  - c)** establish the church for future growth.
  - d)** preserve self-identity.
  
- 2** Church self-government is the foundation needed
  - a)** to build a self-supporting, self-propagating church.
  - b)** to develop national church leaders.
  - c)** for cooperation of the church body.
  - d)** to recognize the ability of the local people.
  
- 3** Paul's method of establishing self-governing churches was to
  - a)** send well-trained leaders from Jerusalem.
  - b)** train local leaders, leave them in charge, then make occasional visits.
  - c)** train local leaders and ask them to send him frequent reports.
  
- 4** A church needs self-government early in its development primarily to
  - a)** promote growth of spiritual ministries and respect for its own leaders.
  - b)** prevent discontent among those who want to be leaders.
  - c)** allow the church planter to go to work in another area.
  - d)** be separate from another church.
  
- 5** Having agreement of standards of doctrine will enable the church to
  - a)** become part of an organized fellowship.
  - b)** have a basis of fellowship and prevent doctrinal error or controversy.
  - c)** function as a center for evangelism.
  - d)** prevent divisions in leadership.

**6** Disciplining a member who has sinned is effective if the result is to

- a)** protect the testimony of the church.
- b)** allow the church to demonstrate its righteousness.
- c)** restore the member to a right relationship with God.
- d)** prevent disagreements in the church.

**7** Which is NOT a good practice for the deacon board to follow?

- a)** It has a regular monthly meeting time.
- b)** The pastor has a prepared list of discussion items.
- c)** The pastor does not vary from his or her discussion list.
- d)** A written record is kept of all board decisions.

**8** It is important that the church members agree on a standard of Christian conduct for the following reasons EXCEPT to

- a)** teach biblical standards of Christian living.
- b)** prevent unworthy persons from becoming members.
- c)** demonstrate the Christian testimony of the church.
- d)** help believers relate biblical teaching to their daily lives.

TRUE-FALSE. Write T in the blank space if the statement is TRUE, and write F if the statement is FALSE.

- ... **9** The deacons of the church have the primary responsibility to assist the pastor in serving the church.
- ... **10** If all members of the deacon board agree on a decision it is not necessary to write it in the minutes.
- ... **11** An effective standard of doctrine is for a church to state that it believes all of the Bible.
- ... **12** The church planter should help the church in its beginning by making the members' difficult decisions for them.
- ... **13** A church with good self-government will be better prepared to be a self-supporting church.
- ... **14** Evidence that self-government promotes spiritual maturity is shown by the church members' desire to participate in the ministries and financial support of the church.



- . . . **15** Paul's method demonstrates that a primary leadership responsibility of the church planter is to train others for leadership.
- . . . **16** The responsibility of the membership committee is to present a list of membership applicants to the church planter for approval.

## **answers to study questions**

---

- 6 a** 2) The church planter  
**b** 3) The church body  
**c** 5) The church board  
**d** 1) The membership committee  
**e** 5) The church board  
**f** 4) The advisory committee
- 1 a** 1) New believers  
**b** 1) New believers  
**c** 2) Church planter  
**d** 1) New believers  
**e** 2) Church planter  
**f** 2) Church planter
- 7** Your answers may be similar to these thoughts:
- a)** that the Holy Spirit intended that qualified men would seek His guidance for their time and culture.
  - b)** they know their local people; their decisions would be more acceptable than those of the church planter alone.
  - c)** their customary methods of selecting leaders.
  - d)** within the local body of believers.
  - e)** work with the pastor to accomplish the work of the church. Or you may have said: They meet to discuss problems, pray, counsel, plan expansion, or do all they can to guide the church to win the lost and advance the kingdom of God.
- 2 a), b), d), and f)** are true.
- 8 a** 3) Official recognition  
**b** 1) Church business meeting  
**c** 2) Board meetings  
**d** 4) Adopting a constitution
- 3 d)** all of the above.
- 9 a), b), d), e), g), and h)** are true.
- 4 a)** form a basis of church government and fellowship.  
**c)** be a help to understand Scripture and prevent error.  
**d)** help the believers relate doctrine to their daily lives.

**10** Peter knew he was fully restored to fellowship with his Lord and among his brothers. Jesus was giving him his place in the work of God. He was entrusted with work to do for the Lord.

**5 a)** guiding believers to an understanding of scriptural teachings which will become their own standards for Christian living.

**11 a), c), and e)** are true.

