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The Relations and Duties of Pastors and Deacons

Originally published in April 1866 under the title: *Suggestions to Canadian Baptist Churches, Pastors, and Deacons*

By R. A. Fyfe

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Editor's Preface

In the mid-1860s, Baptist churches in Ontario faced "considerable dissatisfaction" with the practical outworking of Baptist church polity. Complaints and questions appeared in the denominational magazine, The Canadian Baptist. Robert Alexander Fyfe (1816-1878) was a prominent Baptist educator and, for a time, pastor of the Bond Street Baptist Church, Toronto (now Jarvis St. Baptist). He hesitated to respond in the magazine. First, he said, because he was busy with his own work at the recently formed Woodstock College, and second, because he did not want to present the subject in such a fragmented way in the magazine.

In April 1866, however, Fyfe published a little booklet offering "suggestions." The original title was Suggestions to Canadian Baptist Churches, Pastors, and Deacons, published by the Canadian Baptist Office in Toronto. According to the original preface, Fyfe published his little work "in the hope that they may be read by my brethren" and "that God may bless them, to the establishment of his people in the truth, and in the spirit of Christian love."

We publish it here with the prayer that the Lord would use it to build his church in rural Africa. It is accessible; short, simple, practical and pointed. Sola Deo Gloria

Aaron Dunlop, Oct. 2026

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Introduction

To appreciate the excellence or suitability of the church government system in the Scripture, we first need to consider the character and circumstances of the people it was meant for. A system of government must be adapted to the people it governs; without this alignment, it cannot function effectively.

A perfectly crafted and carefully protected constitution might be entirely disconnected from the people it aims to serve, making it either useless or harmful. Conversely, another legal framework could be somewhat imperfect and loosely structured but still function effectively among groups that do not need many strict rules. Therefore, we must clearly understand the essential elements needed to establish a New Testament church. This understanding helps us determine the church's governance, identify its key officers, and clarify their responsibilities.

This is especially important because understanding the character of the membership indirectly reveals the responsibilities of New Testament church officers and how they primarily fulfil these duties.

Description of a New Testament Church

A church of Christ comprises individuals who have been baptised after professing faith. Out of devotion to their Saviour, they unite to encourage one another, observe the ordinances of the New Testament, and promote the gospel not only within their congregation but also as far as they are able. Members must first be converted—repenting, believing, and being baptised—before they can join the church. See Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12.

Throughout the New Testament, believers are called 'saints,' 'sanctified,' 'holy brethren,' 'partakers of the heavenly calling,' and 'kings and priests unto God.' It is said they have “passed from death unto life,' been 'delivered from the power of darkness,' and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. They are

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described as having “been made partakers of the divine nature' and as being 'the temple of the Holy Spirit.” These are just a few of the terms used to depict church members. Now, let's briefly consider what is expected of these highly esteemed individuals.

Their Relation to God

The Apostle Peter describes their relationship to God as being a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people, emphasising their role in demonstrating His praises, who called them from darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). Similar references in Ephesians 1:12 and 2:7 highlight their adoption into God's family and their status as heirs of His inheritance, sharing jointly with Christ. They are also called God's witnesses. These passages, among many others, outline the duties and privileges that come with the Christian's connection to God.

The Relations of the Members to Each Other

Let's now briefly focus on the responsibilities of church members toward each other. In Ephesians 4:1–3, Paul urges them, *“to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* If members truly took this heartfelt and clear appeal of the inspired apostle to heart, it would be much easier for pastors to lead. Shouldn't members also apply these divine instructions to themselves?

If they fail to learn, shouldn't their teachers reinforce these lessons repeatedly? Philippians 1:27 emphasises that our conduct should reflect the gospel of Christ: *“that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”* Complementing this, Colossians 3:12-14: *“Put on then,*

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as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Pause and prayerfully consider 1 Corinthians 13, where each line is vital for church members and carries life. Could leading a church filled with people embodying this spirit be challenging? These scriptures are backed by what should most influence Christians. The inspired writers emphasise vividly how Christ's members should treat one another and the spirit they should uphold. Since we often struggle with acting more in our own spirit than Christ's, the Bible offers clear, step-by-step guidance to safeguard us from this risk.

It's noteworthy that individuals who once shared the same condemnation and now consider themselves part of the same body—drawing strength from the one Divine Head—often take a long time to understand the fundamental lessons of their faith. The inspired author has aimed to clarify our responsibilities toward fellow church members and to motivate us to fulfil them.

Hear what Paul says in Philippians 2:1–4, *"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

Again, Romans 12:10: *"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour."* In Ephesians 5:21: *"submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."* Lastly, Peter says this: 1 Peter 5:5, "*Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders." Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility*

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toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Such are some of the duties which church members owe to one another, and such is the spirit in which these duties are to be performed.

The Powers of the Church

Let's briefly consider the powers granted by the New Testament to churches composed of such individuals as we have outlined.

1. They alone have the authority to receive new members to their fellowship. Romans 14:1; 15:1, 7; 2 Corinthians 2:1–11.
2. They alone can exclude unworthy members. 1 Corinthians 5:3–5, 5:2, 7; 2 Corinthians 2:6. Also 9, 11, 13.
3. They possess exclusive authority to manage their financial matters, contributing as they see fit for any purpose. No individual or group can impose decisions on members regarding this. This is evident from Peter's statement to Ananias and Paul's reference to the Macedonia church in 2 Corinthians 8:1.
4. They have the right to elect their own officers, as seen in Acts 6:3 and 14:23.

These elements are fundamental to the concept of an independent church: the authority to receive and discipline members, the ability to raise and manage its own funds, and the power to select (and dismiss) its officers, with the latter naturally following from the former. Churches clearly carried out such practices well into the second century, leading the best ecclesiastical historians to universally acknowledge the independence of early churches.

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Practical Lessons

Several key inferences clearly arise from the previous scriptural description of the components of Churches, the duties church members owe to both God and each other, and the spirit that should motivate them.

1. When difficulties arise in a church, it suggests that some members may have wronged the clear teachings of God's word—teachings that are just as vital (especially to the individual Christian) as those relating to church practices or ordinances. The right response for members facing such issues is to ask, "Lord, is it I?" Each person should reflect on their conduct before God to see if they have strayed from the behaviour and spirit the New Testament advocates.
2. We observe that no amount or type of church rules or regulations can fix the problems of a church as described in the New Testament. While these rules might silence disputes or exclude members, they cannot restore moral integrity to those who have strayed or rekindle the true spirit in those who have diverged from the "mind which was in Christ." Perhaps, for this reason, God has not prioritized laws within his church. His aim was not merely to govern people, but to remove moral sickness and ensure salvation. This is why the emphasis is consistently placed on embodying the spirit of Christ among church members. No matter how orthodox one is—without this spirit, nothing else compensates.
3. If the church's members are mainly composed of such spiritual realities, and their obligations are as described, then the leader's authority mainly resembles that of a teacher rather than an ecclesiastical officer. His influence depends largely on his skill in ensuring members fulfil their duties as commanded by the Church's Head. According to the Scriptures, such a people do not need

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> strict laws or regulations; God has already defined their relationships to Himself and to one another.
> These are the duties you must perform and the attitude you must show. If they ignore this, it indicates they are not truly his followers. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." The Christian teacher relies on God's authority to uphold these principles. When people refuse to listen, even when he quotes or appeals to the Master, he must regard them as heathen men and publicans.

After briefly discussing Christian churches and the privileges and responsibilities of their members, we will now examine the types of officers necessary for the effective operation of these organisations.

The Officers of a Church of Christ

The direct testimony of Scripture on this matter is concise, but the indirect lessons and reasonable inferences from the New Testament cannot be ignored. We aim to summarize, as clearly and briefly as possible, the conclusions from our careful study of this subject. Before presenting the New Testament's specific teaching on the issue, some preliminary remarks appear necessary.

Examining the earliest records of Christian development reveals that many phenomena appear to be incidental or temporary. The form and growth of the churches displayed remarkable variations. For instance, Philippians 1:1 indicates that churches around A.D. 62 had bishops and deacons, although the Jerusalem church lacked deacons initially. Ephesians 4:11 lists church officers that Christ intended to give to churches upon his ascension. Comparing these with 1 Corinthians 12:28 shows some differences, which are even more pronounced when contrasted with 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. Further comparison with 1 Timothy 3:1–13 highlights the diverse portrayals of church labourers throughout Scripture.

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How can we explain these apparent contradictions? One way is to look back to Pentecost, where the Spirit's remarkable manifestations occurred. We then examine the records of subsequent churches, noting similar displays. In Corinth, the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 highlight that much of the early church's work was carried out by "gifted members" rather than official leaders, and this work was extraordinary. Back then, members received miraculous gifts from the Spirit and contributed their tithes to God's storehouse, ensuring His house had enough. Many mistakenly believe that all the miraculous workers mentioned were official leaders meant to be ongoing classes. This view overlooks the unique, extraordinary nature of the early Christian development and the lengthy period during which this miraculous character persisted.

In Ephesians 4:11, it states that when Christ ascended, He gave various gifts to men—namely, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Verse 13 indicates that these ministries were intended as temporary, only until the church grew to spiritual maturity. The metaphor suggests a child who needs special care until adulthood. Initially, these labourers had to be provided miraculously, as food was supplied to Adam and Eve, because waiting for natural growth was not feasible. Consequently, converts received help through extraordinary means, possibly in large numbers, until the church could develop its talents normally. Further, 1 Corinthians 12 and other passages make clear that both members and leaders were endowed with miraculous gifts, as indicated in verse 28.

Based on the above considerations, we conclude that the earliest descriptions of Christian churches in the New Testament do not provide a precise account of the types or numbers of official workers Christ intended to be permanent. He did not aim to establish lasting offices for apostles or prophets, nor did he seem to intend for roles like those of Timothy in Ephesus or Titus in Crete to continue indefinitely. Additionally, he did not require the officers, even those succeeding each other in the church, to always possess miraculous gifts. Therefore, much of the early

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church records depict an extraordinary situation not meant to serve as a model for us in all their details.

But you may ask, do you plan to discard the New Testament as the sole authority in church matters? Certainly not. We rely solely on the Word of God. The real question is: what does it teach about church organisation and officers? The history of the apostolic churches shows temporary practices in some areas—such as development processes and the instruments used. However, the inspired writers clearly identify certain principles meant to be universal and everlasting.

Furthermore, in his later years, Paul, and probably John in his letters to the seven churches, refer only to a limited number of church officers when addressing the "angels" of these churches. A close examination of Scripture reveals that only two types of church officers were intended to be eternal: "bishops and deacons," mentioned in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1–13. The latter, in particular, provides inspired instructions to a person tasked with "setting the churches in order," and it mentions only "bishops and deacons." This strongly suggests that these were the only church officers meant to be permanent.

Bishops And Elders

Here we are reminded that the first class of officers were called by two names, "bishops" and "elders." On this I need only remark that the two titles are used interchangeably, as can easily be proved by comparing Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; Philippians 1:1. The word "bishop" (used only four times with reference to ministers) translates the Greek idea of the office, and "elder" (used seventeen times in this sense) translates the Jewish idea of the office. We conclude, then, that there are only two classes of "office-bearers," "bishops or elders" and deacons.

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Plurality Of Elders

In this context, many churches mentioned in the New Testament refer to multiple elders, and the church at Philippi lists several bishops. Does this imply that each church can have more than one elder or bishop? We believe multiple elders are likely a peripheral detail rather than a core requirement for organising a Christian church. Here are some considerations that support this view.

In major cities such as Jerusalem, Antioch, and Corinth, the converts and listeners would become too numerous to gather in a single private home within a few weeks. Additionally, we know that the Jews would not permit them to meet in the Synagogues. One writer put it this way;[1]

> *"We previously mentioned that early congregations initially gathered in a member's house. In larger towns, where such a space couldn't accommodate everyone, smaller groups from distant parts of the community would meet elsewhere on Sundays. When a skilled teacher of doctrinal instruction settled in the town, he might also form a circle of believers who would assemble at his residence to listen to his spiritual teachings. This explains references in Paul's letters to churches meeting in members' houses, like Aquila's. Justin Martyr alluded to this practice during his audience with the Roman Prefect, when asked, 'Where do you assemble?' he responded, 'Where each person can and will. You think we all meet in one place, but it's not so; for the Christian God isn't confined to one location, but His invisible presence fills heaven and earth, and He is worshiped everywhere by the faithful.' Justin further noted that when he visited Rome, he habitually stayed in one place, where instructed Christians*

[1] August Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, trans. Joseph Torrey, vol. 1 (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1856), 290–291; edited and abridged.

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> *who wished to hear him would gather, as he hadn't visited other assembly sites."*

Olshausen, in his comments on Romans 16:4, says, *"This well-known family, Priscilla and Aquila, seems to have had their home serve as a meeting place, not only in Rome but also in Corinth and Ephesus. Given the size of a city like Rome, it is natural to assume that there were early designated assembly sites scattered throughout the city."*[2]

It is well known that no church buildings are mentioned in the first century. Therefore, Christians likely gathered in private homes, and large cities would have had numerous meeting places. With many gathering spots, many experienced Christians, or "elders," would have overseen these meetings. Supporting this view, the term "elders" (plural) is almost always used in connection with large cities or major population centres. Even Acts 14:23 confirms this, referring to "the churches" in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch where elders were appointed—these are probably the places they visited. Conversely, in Romans 16:5 and 23; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15, and others, where smaller churches are mentioned, there is no mention of a group of elders. Aquila appears to have been the "elder" of churches that met in his house in Rome, Ephesus, and Corinth successively, while Archippus was likely the "elder" of the church in Philemon's house at Colossae.

Two main theories about elders exist: one view suggests that large cities had small, independent groups meeting in homes, called a church, similar to Antioch and Jerusalem. Elders in these groups were often called elders of the church in Ephesus. Others reject this view, proposing each city had one church led by a council of elders.

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[2] *Commentary on the New Testament, Adapted Especially for Preachers and Students, Containing the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, trans. clergymen of the Church of England, 2nd ed., carefully revised (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1854), 426.

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This second view is difficult to support from Scripture. We cannot genuinely claim that a “council” or “college of elders” was necessary for properly organising a Christian church, without also denying that there was truly any church in the homes of Philemon or Aquilas. We believe the multiple elders mentioned arose from the specific circumstances of early churches. It should not be seen as essential to the correct organisation of the Church of Christ. If circumstances demand more than one elder, then we should have them; otherwise, not.

Qualifications of an Elder or Bishop

What, then, defines the character and duties of a bishop or elder? “A bishop should be above reproach, the husband of one wife, alert, sober-minded, well-behaved, hospitable, skilled in teaching; not addicted to wine, not violent, not greedy for dishonest gain; patient, not quarrelsome, not covetous. He must manage his own household well, with his children in respectful obedience, for if a man cannot rule his own household, how can he care for God's church? He should not be a recent convert, to prevent pride from leading him into the devil's condemnation.

Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among those who are without, to avoid reproach and the devil's trap. 1 Timothy 3:1–7. Read this together with Titus 1:6–9, where another inspired writer describes the social and religious qualities of a Christian bishop or elder.

The Mutual Relations of Pastor and People

The bond between the man described in Scripture and the people under his care is delicate and sacred. Throughout the New Testament, Scripture portrays the relationship between a pastor and his congregation as profoundly noble. Hebrews 13:17 urges them to obey and submit to their leaders, who watch over their souls as those accountable to God. 2 Corinthians 11:2

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describes their jealousy as a godly concern for their flock. 2 Thessalonians 2:19 asks, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ?" They are tasked with feeding and overseeing God's flock willingly, not out of greed, but with a sincere heart, serving as examples rather than lording over their charge (1 Peter 5:2-3).

Members are addressed as follows: "Know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. Esteem them highly in love, for their work's sake." (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13). Considering the high and sacred nature of the minister's task—summed up as striving "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28; see also Ephesians 5:27; 2 Corinthians 11:2)—can we assume that frequent changes of pastors lead to proper appreciation of this profound responsibility? A minister experiencing constant change might forget he is called to this great work, and churches might forget they need it done.

To present a people perfect before God," to train up efficient, faultless servants for Christ in their respective roles demands time, skill, patience, and prayer. The pastoral relationship is not simply a matter of convenience, just like marriage. It is rooted in deep, mutual respect and love, established by the true head of the Church. He has provided clear guidance for both pastors and congregations on how they should treat one another. Ignoring or breaking this spiritual, enduring bond for trivial reasons harms the church and ministers alike. Pastors are called to oversee and nurture God's church, using their words and actions to strengthen faith and constantly work toward presenting each believer as perfect before God (Colossians 1:28–29).

The Elder in the Pulpit

The entire New Testament emphasizes the importance of preaching. Paul, in his solemn charge to Timothy, highlights this work by urging, "Preach the gospel; be instant in season, out of

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season." Among all thoughtful Baptists, it is widely held that preaching is the primary duty of a minister. Regardless of other responsibilities, a minister's preparation for the pulpit should never be neglected. While some ministers, due to the need to work secular jobs to support their families, may not be able to dedicate ample time to sermon preparation, churches that do not support their pastors have no right to expect all their time and efforts to be focused solely on them.

However, when ministers dedicate themselves to their work, they must study and read diligently to bring valuable insights into the sanctuary, like the best of oil. They should set aside time specifically for preparation, and their congregation, if they wish to be truly edified or benefit, should generally avoid interfering unless necessary. A minister must explain the doctrines of God's Word in relation to each other, to truth overall, and to the Bible's precepts and promises. In doing so, he must consider the different groups and ages of his audience, as well as the current times and seasons. Ultimately, he must pray earnestly and prepare thoroughly and thoughtfully for his pulpit duties.

Pastoral Visiting

A major distraction for a diligent minister is the perceived right many people claim to have for pastoral visits. Congregants often expect the minister to be frequently at their homes for social calls. Since this issue cannot be perfectly balanced for everyone and no specific guidance is provided in the scriptures, the pastor must ultimately decide how much time to dedicate to visiting his congregation. His duty is to do as much good as possible. If he believes that visiting more will be most beneficial spiritually, he should do so; if studying more would be more effective, he should prioritize that.

A pastor should make visits to get to know his congregation, but the amount of time spent is ultimately up to him. Regardless, his

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visits should be pastoral in nature, ideally including religious services whenever possible.

Special Efforts or Protracted Meetings

Ministers often work tirelessly without immediate success in bringing men to the faith. This can lead to discouragement and resignation, or the temptation to use questionable methods to attract attention. Many respected ministers have also avoided “protracted meetings” due to past excesses. While some argue that Christians should always be enthusiastic and that gradual church growth is ideal, historical evidence shows otherwise. Historically, significant efforts—often labelled as “special”—have occurred during periods of notable religious revival.

The spread of the gospel initially relied on repeated “protracted prayer meetings" and “protracted preaching meetings.” The principle behind this approach is simple: impressions made on the Sabbath are often lost during the week, but in a “protracted meeting," the message remains before the mind until it bears fruit through God's blessing. We should protect these special times for prayer and preaching from potential abuses passed down by tradition, but we also recommend holding such efforts every two or three years in each church. A pastor could invite a nearby like-minded pastor to assist for a few weeks and then reciprocate. This way, a faithful minister can, over time, intensify efforts to gather a harvest. We strongly believe that well-conducted initiatives like these, if widely adopted, would have led to greater success in recent years than what was observed.

The Pastor in the Church Meeting

The elder or pastor naturally serves as chairman at every church meeting because of his office. Denying him this role effectively removes him from his position. He is regarded as "the leader” among his congregation, as referenced in Heb. 13:17. Even in

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simple matters, a chairman has the right to be informed about the agenda beforehand. Similarly, the pastor should be notified in advance about all topics to be discussed at the church meeting. While he cannot stop any member from raising a subject in an organised manner, he can require prior knowledge of what will be brought up or discussed.

Whenever we neglect to respect our chairman, we undermine our own self-respect. If someone cannot be respected as chairman, they should be replaced promptly because, in meetings, we must all receive the same treatment as the chairman. However, the pastor is more than just the meeting's chairman; he is also the teacher and leader. Therefore, he has the authority not only to preside but also to explain and enforce all measures brought before the Church. While he shouldn't argue or debate with members, he may clarify issues and the people's duties regarding them. He should constantly remind his congregation of their professed beliefs and the spirit with which they should act toward each other, all while embodying the spirit of Christ.

It is probably unnecessary to further point out that every religious activity within the church should be under the pastor's overall supervision. This includes the Bible Class, Sabbath School, Missionary Organisations, and others—all of which fall under his oversight, along with the work of the church officers. However, his supervision should be fraternal, straightforward, and rooted in reverence for God. He does not have the right to impose commands but should lovingly promote, through words and actions, the spirit of Christ and the Christian duties outlined in the Word of God.

The Bishop or Elder Rules

The bishop or elder is intended to lead the church, a point clearly supported by Scripture. Refer to 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:7, 17. Some have tried to artificially distinguish between teaching elders and ruling elders, but while there can be significant

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differences in their ability to lead—similar to differences in other talents—it is evident from Timothy's qualifications that all bishops should be “apt to teach" and able to "rule well." In essence, the same responsibilities apply to all.

The offensive nature of the term 'ruling' comes from a misunderstanding about the kind of authority a "ruler" claims to have. Is it spiritual or moral authority? It appears that an elder's authority primarily comes from his teachings and personal character. He governs by conveying the truth in God's name. What other methods can he use? He can only influence morally or resort to force, but force is not an option. Therefore, his authority is exercised through truth spoken in love.

He must clearly present the doctrines, duties, and promises found in Scripture, as these are the tools he uses to influence his congregation. He can also remind them of the character they are called to uphold, which is a strong vantage point since, if the pastor sticks to teaching God's word, the members are obliged to obey him. God demands obedience; refusing it means they sin not only against their pastor but also against God.

The New Testament serves as the essential authority for both pastors and congregations. If an elder diverges from God's Word in any requirement, the congregation is not obliged to follow him. Only the inspired scripture binds both parties. When a man embodies the qualities described by inspiration, inviting him to lead implies a mutual commitment to follow the teachings of the New Testament in all matters related to the relationship between the congregation and the pastor. Similarly, he commits himself to interpret, teach, and lovingly apply God's Word, and to submit to its directives, especially regarding his duties to the people. A church membership as outlined earlier, along with a pastor like those described by Timothy and Titus, should find it straightforward to work harmoniously together.

When unsuitable members are quickly brought into the church, or when pastors avoid the diligent work of training inexperienced members in their duties according to God's word, problems can

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arise. Similarly, if an elder, because of shyness or other reasons, fails to faithfully enforce the discipline mandated in the New Testament—or tries to do so solely through church rules—we should not be surprised by conflicts or "friction" within the church. The moral aspect in leadership and discipline is far more important because it is ultimately what God Himself uses to influence and develop people.

Ministers' Salaries

On the other hand, when an elder or pastor ministers to a congregation, they are entitled to proper support. We do not seek wealth or luxury for our ministry, but rather a comfortable and respectable livelihood. Scripture is clear on this matter. "The elder who rules well," as we have explained, deserves "double honour"—which, as the best interpreters suggest, means double pay or compensation. God has been explicit about this, as seen in 1 Timothy 5:17 and 1 Corinthians 9:5-15. Jesus also affirms in Matthew 10:10, "The labourer deserves his food," and Paul emphasises in Galatians 6:6, *"Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches."*

Much of the current discomfort between pastors and churches stems from inadequate support provided to pastors, both spiritually and financially. Many churches have never been taught the importance of generosity. Their pastors have hesitated to encourage this virtue out of fear of appearing self-interested. Additionally, numerous small churches have been established solely for regional convenience, yet they lack the strength to support a pastor properly. The Scriptures clearly state that when a people receive spiritual nourishment from a pastor, they are also obliged to support him financially. This principle is laid down by the head of the Church as a law. It is not merely charity, but a matter of justice, rooted in God's commandments and true religion.

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The practice of "hiring a minister for a year," with annual reviews and renewals, often at the lowest salary, has significantly undermined the sacredness of the pastoral relationship, leading to a decline in respect for both the congregation and the Pastor.

The Deacons

The next group of church leaders is the deacons, and the inspired requirements for them are as follows: *"Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus"* 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

Readers can also look at Acts 6:3 for additional insight. By examining the original duties given to deacons and the outlined requirements, we get a clearer understanding of what defines a true deacon's role. The primary purpose of the deaconate is to support the pastor. There should be no rivalry between elders and deacons; both groups must concentrate on advancing the church's mission. Everyone must set aside selfish interests, aiming instead to promote the gospel and preserve the unity of the Spirit through peace.

Deacons are chosen to oversee the church's temporal affairs. For this they were first elected; and the inspired Paul explicitly considered this part of their duties, emphasising that they should avoid greed for financial gain. To fulfil their responsibilities effectively, deacons should meet regularly with their pastor and carefully prepare for all upcoming church business. They need to understand not only what issues will be discussed but also how to

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present them and who should do so. Properly introducing topics before the meeting is crucial. Many complications and disputes have arisen from bringing issues into the church outside the gospel framework established in Matthew 18. Therefore, the pastor and deacons should first agree on the matters to be addressed and how to present them. If they cannot reach consensus, the entire church will likely face difficulty.

Settling Business Difficulties

Deacons should resolve business disputes outside the church meeting whenever possible. We emphasise this because we believe churches often underestimate its importance. Disputes over business or trade are frequently brought before the entire church, leading to resentment, misunderstandings, and divisions. The church was meant to foster mutual spiritual growth, not to handle complex financial issues. In fact, most disputes over boundary lines or perceived overreach in business are rarely resolved in open church meetings without causing lingering wounds within the congregation.

It has been assumed that all matters must be brought before the church, but this is a serious mistake, as shown in 1 Corinthians 6:1–7. Paul clearly indicates that issues handled by civil law, or worldly affairs, should be resolved through Christian arbitration. For example, 1 Corinthians 6:5 asks, “Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?” This explicitly suggests that business disputes should be settled by trustworthy Christian brothers or brethren.

Scripture also shows that the early churches gathered primarily for spiritual growth rather than hours spent debating conflicting issues. Therefore, we establish a rule: the deacons who resolve the most disputes or difficulties outside the church meetings provide the most valuable service to the church that appoints them. They should report to the church when matters (if the church is aware of them) have been settled. If the church agrees,

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they will appreciate the deacons for preventing trouble, and possibly division.

In passing, we note that churches facing unresolved difficulties often call an “advisory council' to hear the case. In many cases, these councils are ineffective because participants tend to stick to their original opinions, and they may follow the council's advice only if it suits them. The only truly valuable 'councils' are those of arbitration, where involved parties agree to submit the case and accept the decision. The only biblical 'council' resembling this is the one in Jerusalem, where elders and apostles made a binding decision. It would be more efficient if those calling councils first agreed to accept the invited brethren's decision, saving time and trouble.

Deacons Labour In Spiritual Things

There is another aspect of the deaconship: assisting the pastor with spiritual matters. It seems that deacons are not expected to be involved in the church's spiritual concerns. However, the qualifications for deacons strongly suggest involvement in religious work alongside financial duties; for example, requiring deacons to “hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” and to “purchase to himself a good degree, and great boldness in the faith.” Thus, deacons are meant to work in spiritual areas with their pastors, according to the talents and opportunities given by God. Looking at the first deacons chosen, most of them were preachers who engaged in spiritual work beyond caring for the poor and other duties.

Closing Remarks

These are some features of a Christian church, along with the responsibilities of its pastor and deacons. As we conclude our suggestions, we encourage our readers to prayerfully reflect on these points. Let us think about the kind of people we should be,

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and let the elders remember their tasks and the methods they must use to carry them out.

The Baptist minister's ecclesiastical authority is minimal; our denomination has the least of this. God intended for us to be weak ecclesiastically but strong morally and spiritually. When a Baptist church loses the Spirit of the Master, it should disband; but when filled with His Spirit, it should be as formidable as an army with banners. Scripture emphasises the importance of possessing the spirit of Christ—patient, humble, and forbearing—as essential. “If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” To address our church difficulties, we must seek more of Jesus's loving, self-sacrificing spirit.

Whenever divisions or decay occur in our churches, it clearly indicates that we have abandoned our first love. This is the cause and the sole remedy: we must return to our original love, or else face decline.