

The Sovereignty of the Local Church

The highest thing in the church is an elder, not a bishop, not some presbyter or something. God deals with the elder of that church. Now, he gives his church his message, and what they have need of. [1]

The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes:

Revelation 2:15 : "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate."

Further the Prophet of God told us: You will recall that I brought out in the Ephesian Age that the word, Nicolaitane, comes from two Greek words: Nikao which means to conquer, and Lao which means the laity. **Nicolaitane means, "to conquer the laity"**. Now why is this such a terrible thing? It is terrible because God has never placed His church in the hands of an elected leadership which moves with political mindedness. **He has placed His church in the care of God-ordained, Spirit-filled, Word-living men who lead the people through feeding them the Word.** He has not separated the people into classes so that the masses are led by a holy priesthood. It is true that the leadership must be holy, but then so must be the whole congregation. Further, there is no place in the Word where priests or ministers or such mediate between God and the people, nor is there a place where they are separated in their worship of the Lord. **God wants all to love and serve Him together.** Nicolaitanism destroys those precepts and instead **separates the ministers from the people and makes the leaders overlords instead of servants.**

Now this doctrine actually started as a deed in the first age. It appears that the problem lay in two words: 'elders' (presbyters) and 'overseers' (bishops). Though Scripture shows that there are several elders in each church, some began (Ignatius among them) to teach that the idea of a bishop was one of pre-eminence or authority and control over the elders.

Now the truth of the matter is the word 'elder' signifies who the person is, while the word 'bishop' signifies the office of the same man. The elder is the man. Bishop is the office of the man. 'Elder' always has and always will refer simply to a man's chronological age in the Lord. He is an elder, not because he is elected or ordained, etc., but because he is older. He is more seasoned, trained, not a novice, reliable because of experience and long standing proof of his Christian experience.

But no, the bishops did not stick to the epistles of Paul, but rather they went to Paul's account of the time he called the elders from Ephesus to Miletus in Acts 20. **In verse 17 the record states, "elders" were called and**

then in verse 28 they are called overseers (bishops). And these bishops, (no doubt political minded and anxious for power) insisted that Paul had given the meaning that 'overseers' were **more than the local elder with official capacity only in his own church. To them a bishop was now one with extended authority over many local leaders. Such a concept was neither Scriptural nor historical, yet even a man of the stature of Polycarp leaned toward such organization.**

Thus, that which started as a deed in the first age was made a literal doctrine **and so it is today.** Bishops still claim power to control men and deal with them as they desire, placing them where they so will in the ministry. **This denies the leadership of the Holy Ghost** Who said, "Separate Me Paul and Barnabas for the work where-unto I have called them" This is anti-Word and anti-Christ (*Matthew 20:25-28*). [2]

Now, remember the reason that I just kind of stuck with the Baptist church **was the sovereignty of the local church what I think is apostolic.** You see? Not as the Baptist, we have in there... I don't even attend the fellowships, but in the Baptist church is not a denomination. It's not supposed to be. It is now, but it was not supposed to be a denomination. **It's a brotherhood, and it's the sovereignty of the local church.** And if God is ever going to get a message to His man, **His elder,** which is the... According to the Bible, **the highest office in the local church is the elder.** And now, with--coming through the elder has to go to the state presbyter, and the so forth, and on back to bishop, and then it's wrote, "We believe this period. That's all." [3]

Don't put a bishop over it. Let the Holy Ghost stay over it. See? The Holy Ghost was sent to keep the weeds and things out; not what the bishop thinks, or the overseers, or so forth. **It takes the Holy Spirit to keep that church in its condition.** He was that perfect Word as we will see.

Adam had his choice: the Word and live, or disbelieve one Word and die.

We have the same choice, 'cause we have to be. If God put Adam on the Word, and the Word only, then He puts us on a creed or any kind of a creed, then God's unjust in His judgment; it isn't becoming to His holiness nor His sovereignty. **But it is becoming to His sovereignty** to see that He puts every man on the same base. **And He's God and changes not.** What God does first, He forever does the same thing. **He never changes His program.** Only thing, He magnifies it, but He never changes it. The same thing continues on. [4]

It's official, as long as the church. **In our church, it's the sovereignty of the church. The church moves,** or puts in the trustee, the church moves the pastor, or puts in the pastor, **whatever it is, it is the church in all. That's apostolic.** That's the way it was did in the Bible time. Therefore, we feel that **no one person** then is a dictator or something in the church. We don't want

that. Every man, every person, myself, in voting in anyone, **has just got one vote**, just like any other person of the church here, just one vote. **It isn't what I say; it's what the church says what the church says in the body.** You like that? Oh, I think that's just Scriptural. That's the way it should be. [5]

You all voted a hundred percent on it, so we've held right to that. See? **The church is sovereign. What the church says, that's what...** Trustees or nobody else... The trustees is just, each one, a vote. The pastor is just one vote. It's the church, it's the democracy of the church, **the sovereignty of the church. The church in whole, speaks.** That's all. And we like that, **because we have no bishops, or hierarchies, or overseers,** or so forth to tell us this, that, or the other. **It's the Holy Spirit in the church, does the speaking; I like that rule, and it's very fine.** [6]

And by the way, while I'm speaking: somebody in--around this country somewhere is guilty of writing some cards **to move Brother Neville out of this pulpit.** You're going to have to settle that with me. Uh-huh, that's right. Uh-huh, yes, indeed. Now, I want you... It said something about the deacon board. The deacon board has not one thing to do with that pastor. No, sir. **The congregation in full has all the authority.** It isn't... A deacon board's just a policeman here in this church, just to keep order and so forth. **But when it comes to rules, the whole church has to say so. This church is built upon the sovereignty of the local church.** Therefore, I have nothing to say in moving this pastor, or putting one in. I own the property; it's given to the church. **You all are the church;** you people are the one who control. You're the church yourself. **And the Church, the holy Church of God is the sovereignty,** is the Holy Spirit in that Church. And the only thing I do is own the property, give it over to this church as a--give it over for a church, and it's tax free. **And the church elects their own pastors.** I have nothing to do with it. And the only way this pastor could ever leave, **would be the pastor decide himself to go, or the majority of the votes of the church would have to say, "Change the pastor"**. And that's the only way; no deacon board can do it. The deacon board only keeps order and things in the church.

The trustees, they have nothing to do with it, **only repair the church.** And they can't do it until the whole trustee board meets and says, "We'll build this, or we'll do that." Then they have to ask the treasurer if they got the money to do it. Yes, sir. [7]

But I believe in the supreme authority of the local assembly. Yes, let each church be its own, choose its pastors, its deacons, its whatever it is. **And then, that way, the man in there has no bishop over him.** The Holy Spirit wants to speak something to that church, **they don't have to ask anybody about whether they could do this or do that. It's the individual**

in contact with the Holy Spirit. Show me by the Bible, what's greater in the Bible than a local elder to a local church? That's right. **Yes, sir, the sovereignty of the local church, each church in itself...** Now, brotherhood, that's wonderful. **All churches ought to be in a brotherhood like that together.** But the sovereignty of local church! [8]

Now, if there's anything wrong in the church that you ever know of, some individual or some person or anything, you are duty bound and will answer before God if you don't clear that thing out, you, the church. **Now, you remember, it's not on my shoulders; it's on yours.** And anything wrong in the church, **God will make you answer for it.** That's right. That's the way He runs His church. That's the way it is in the Bible. That's the order of the Bible. **That's the sovereignty of the local church; the pastor is the head.** That's right. Amen.

Therefore, no one person has nothing to do in this; **it's the majority of the people.** Yes, sir. If twenty votes for him, and twenty-one votes against him, he goes, or vice versa. See? That is, **it's the sovereignty of the local church,** and then each one of the members has a say-so in the church. Anything goes on wrong, then they can come right around, and the only thing they have to do is to be before God that they are absolutely see that nothing hinders the moving of the church.

But the full and complete authority of the church is the pastor. Read that in the Bible; see if that's not Bible order. That's exactly right. **There's no one above the elder.** I have nothing to do with what Brother Neville does here. That's up to you and Brother Neville. [7]

And now the Church of God is the highest of judgment, and the pastor is the highest order in the Church. The elder is the highest thing in the apostolic Church, outside of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings His Message straight to the elder, and the elder gives It to the people. [9]

Reference:

- [1] "Just One More Time, Lord" (63-0120E), par. 75
- [2] "Pergamean Church Age", Church-Age-Book pg. 197
- [3] "India Trip Report" (57-0126B), par. E-15
- [4] "Harvest Time" (64-1212), par. 115-117
- [5] "Super Sense" (59-1227E), par. 16
- [6] "Key To The Door" (62-1007), par. 8
- [7] "Hebrews Chapter 7 Part 2 And Church Order" (57-0922), par. 276-282, 292
- [8] "Hebrews Chapter 5&6" (57-0908M), par. 26
- [9] "Church Order" (58-1007), COD-pg. 1199

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There's coming one with a Message that's straight on the Bible, and quick work will circle the earth. The seeds will go in newspapers, reading material, until every predestinated Seed of God has heard It.
[Bro. Branham in „Conduct-Order-Doctrine“, page 724]