



exalted authority to one called “a bishop” as distinct from the elders.

Over time the “bishop” of a given city began to presume authority over the *paroikia* a word used in the New Testament only in reference to a “stranger” or a “so-

journing” (Acts 13:17; 1 Peter 1:17) but gradually used in reference to the surrounding area of a city. This “Parish” was considered to be under the authority of the bishop. When Constantine made his version of apostate “Christianity” the faith of the Roman empire, he organized churches within the empire after the pattern of Roman governmental authority. A *dioikesis* or “diocese” was the district over which a Roman governor held authority. Constantine defined the jurisdiction of a bishop under the same terms. This word was never used in the New Testament, and the authority of those who served as bishops was never given to one man alone nor higher than oversight of the local church.



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ISSUE

12.48

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

November 28
2010



Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
Bill Davis
Steve Dixon
Pat Goguen
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Jason Garcia

Bishops Over More Than One Church

By Kyle Pope

Small departures from Biblical patterns often result in major changes over time. What begins as an effort to make something more “efficient” from a human point of view, can snowball into the radical creation of false doctrines put forward to justify a practice. Each time the Roman Catholic church appoints a new “pope” this is illustrated so clearly. The false doctrines that claim that the “bishop of Rome” is the “Vicar of Christ” (i.e. Christ’s representative on earth), who is “infallible” (i.e. incapable of doctrinal error when teaching *ex cathedra* “from the chair”) and the “earthly head of the church” would never have been considered if men had not long ago left the Biblical patterns set forth for local church leadership. When men arrogantly and presumptuously set one man over a congregation, then a group of congregations, then a region, then a nation, a rationale had to be put forth to justify having one man presume to act as head over all congregations.

This evolving departure and unscriptural rationale gave birth to the papal system.

I submit that the first step that led to this radical falsehood came from a redefinition of the highest role of leadership which the Holy Spirit established over the local church. In the New Testament local congregations appointed a group of men to over-



Olsen Park church of Christ

see the work of that congregation alone. These men were chosen based upon explicit qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Their work was illustrated by the three Greek names the Holy Spirit used to describe their work. A man who was chosen was a *poimen* “a shepherd or pastor” (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2) who led and fed the flock. He was a *presbyteros* “an elder or presbyter” (Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1), not a youngster nor a novice to the faith but one with the experience needed to help the young to grow. Such a man acted as an *episcopos* “an overseer or bishop” (1 Timothy 3:1; Acts 20:28) who watched over the work of the local church.

Two factors characterized these leaders as they were set forth in the New Testament. First, their office was always a plurality. In every reference to the leadership of an actual congregation in the New Testament the role is always spoken of in the plural and never in the singular. Paul met with the “**elders of the church**” from Ephesus in Miletus (Acts 20:17) whom he referred to as “**overseers**” (Acts 20:28). Titus was left in Crete to appoint “**elders in every city**” (Titus 1:5). James urged the sick to call “**for the elders of the church**” to pray for them (James 5:14). Second, this office held authority over the local church only. Paul urged the Ephesian elders to take heed to the flock “**among which**” the Holy Spirit made them overseers (Acts 20:28). The Hebrew writer spoke of those who rule over the breth-

ren as responsible to “**watch out for**” the souls of those under their authority, facing the the duty to “**give an account**” for this oversight (Hebrews 13:17). Such a responsibility could only be carried out when there was a limited realm for which the leader was responsible to account.

In the earliest historical documents written by Christians which come after the new Testament the Biblical pattern is upheld. A work written in the late First or early Second century known as *The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, speaks of the appointment of “bishops and deacons” over believers occurring from “ancient times” (42). It speaks of of the “Bishop’s office” as synonymous with the work of “presbyters” (44). The work rebukes the church of Corinth for “sedition against its presbyters” (47). These are spoken of as “duly appointed presbyters” chosen by the “flock of Christ” (54), unto whom the church is charged to submit and “receive chastisement” from them (57). A contemporary work known as the *Didache* also echoes the Biblical pattern. It charges congregations to appoint “bishops and deacons” (15).

The first works which show a departure from this pattern come in the Second century, written by Ignatius. In Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Magne-*

sians, he speaks to them of “Damas your godly bishop and your worthy presbyters Bassus and Apollonius” with a deacon subject to them (2). He tells the Trallians to do “nothing without the bishop; but be ye obedient also to the presbytery” (2). Unlike the Biblical pattern seen in Paul’s letter to the Philippians which describes church leadership as comprising “bishops and deacons” (1:1), in Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Philadelphians* this is changed to be comprised of “the bishop and the presbyters who are with him” along with the deacons (1). Ignatius, in his *Epistle to the Smyrneans* even forbids baptism without “the bishop” (8). This shows a clear departure from the Biblical pattern and the attribution of