

# Who Is Qualified To Govern?

"I just had to take control" asserts the new Prime Minister. As a child she lived a few doors from the Mitcham Baptist church, Adelaide, attended Sunday School and was part of the youth group. When being sworn into office she refused to swear on the Bible, instead made an affirmation. In responding to a question from John Fein on ABC 774 radio, Julia Gillard clearly stated she was an atheist. Does it matter that Australia is now being led by a declared atheist, a person who lives with a man to whom she is not married, has liberal views on some ethical issues? I believe it does.

What about church leadership? Chuck Swindoll notes that church government is an exciting and vitally important topic to everyone in the congregation. He challenges those who think differently to look again at the last church split they have heard of or experienced to see if church government isn't a relevant and profoundly important issue. So, the topic of church governance is highly relevant, extremely practical and vital to the proper functioning of the family of God.

Jesus and the apostles make little comment about persons holding secular political office. They do give great attention to those who are religious leaders. In fact, it is the religious leaders who initiate the arrest of Jesus. But the Bible prescribes the type of people who are to be recognised and appointed as leaders in the church.

The church is a 'theocracy' where Christ "is the head of the body, the church" Colossians 1:18. Strauch suggests some distinguishing features that are to characterise those who lead a local church.

**Firstly**, leaders are to be those of a humble, servant, caring character [Matthew 23:1-12; Mark 9:34,35; 10:32-45].

**Secondly**, leadership of a local church is a shared responsibility by people who unitedly shepherd the church [1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Peter 5:1-4].

**Thirdly**, church leadership is non-clerical in structure. Elders pastor the flock. Biblical leadership cannot coexist with a clergy-laity division.

**Fourthly**, there are scriptural qualifications. Church leaders must meet the Bible's objective, moral and spiritual requirements [1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:2-3; Acts 20:28].

**Fifthly**, congregational submission. The elders are Christ's undershepherds and stewards. The eldership oversees, leads and shepherds the local congregation of God. The congregation is to obey and submit to their guidance, protection and care [Hebrews 13:17]. Yet, there is to be close, mutual cooperation between leaders and congregation, for all are under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and His holy Word. The chief, guiding principle for church government is that Jesus Christ is supreme Lord, Head and Shepherd [1 Peter 5:1-4].

"Let no one think that all a church needs is correct organization. Nothing could be further from the truth. Certainly, a congregation can have a plurality of leaders and be cold, lifeless and spiritually underdeveloped." Ultimately, the character and living example of those who lead is all most important.