

## **Church Governance**

"It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is not an essential element in the theology of the church." -George Eldon Ladd

"It is not as much as hinted in the New Testament that the church would ever need or indeed should ever want or tolerate any other local leadership than that of the eldership group." -J. Alec Motyer

The history of church governance falls into three main categories (which exist to this day) --

**Episcopal Government** (from the Greek word that translates into English as "bishop.")

This is the polity of the Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and (some) Lutheran Churches.

This form of government emphasizes a central leader or the authority of a conclave of leader bishops who determine the theology and exercise of the church collectively.

The episcopal form of government has been the polity of the Church catholic as early as Ignatius of Antioch, all the way down to the time of the Reformation. Advocates for an episcopal form of church government argue that the sheer fact that it went virtually uncontested until the time of the Reformation testifies to its claims of apostolicity. The apostles are said to have practiced ordination by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 4:14), and they appointed elders in the churches they founded (Acts 14:23), presumably with the laying on of hands. On this view the apostles were the supreme ministers in the early church, and they took care that suitable men were ordained to the ministry. To some of them they entrusted the power to ordain and so provided for the continuance of the ministry in succeeding generations.

## **Congregational Government**

With a renewed emphasis on the priesthood of every believer, congregational church government has dominated the Protestant church. This form of church government, most often found in Baptist churches, usually maintains the presence and title of elders/pastors and deacons/trustees, but the power resides with the members of the congregation, who vote concerning yearly budgets, church programs, and leadership appointments. Divisiveness can be a negative result of this format, but the added accountability can stave off blatant corruption.

## **Presbyterian Government** (derivative of the Greek word for “elder.”)

One other popular system is the presbyterian church government. As indicated below, this simply means that the church is lead by the eldership (who are supported by the deacons). The church body may have limited say into the major decisions of the church, but those who meet the biblical qualifications for leadership share the responsibility and authority in the church.

## **Forms of Worship**

The Regulative Principle of worship in Christian theology teaches that the public worship of God should include those and only those elements that are instituted, commanded, or appointed by command or example in the Bible. In other words, it is the belief that God institutes in Scripture whatever He requires for worship in the Church, and everything else should be avoided.

The "regulative principle" is often contrasted with the “Normative Principle” of worship, which teaches that whatever is not prohibited in Scripture is permitted in worship, so long as it is agreeable to the peace and unity of the Church. In other words, there must be

agreement with the general practice of the Church and no prohibition in Scripture for whatever is done in worship.

The regulative principle of worship is generally practiced by the conservative Reformed churches and in other conservative Protestant denominations and it find expression in confessional documents such as the Westminster Confession of Faith and the London Baptist Confession of Faith. The normative principle of worship is the generally accepted approach to worship outside of reformed circles as practiced by Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and independent Bible Churches.

### Ministers

All service to God falls under the heading of ministry. Whether it's serving in the Temple in the OT or providing for the needs of one another, it's all ministry in the Bible.

In my Lutheran background, we referred to our church overseer as the minister.

There are actually three Greek words translated "minister" in the NT --

1) **Diakonos** - (verb: diakoneo) from a root that means "to run on errands"; an attendant, i.e. (genitive case) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties); That word was then applied in the NT to a Christian teacher / pastor / a deacon

But, the important thing to recognize is that the heart of "ministry" is to be a servant.

### 2) **Leitourgos**

from which we get words like "liturgy" or "liturgical" meaning, "to be a public servant, i.e. (by analogy) to perform religious or charitable functions.

Rom. 15:27 - Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister (*leitourgeō*) to them also in material things.

3) **Huperetes** -- literally, an “under rower” or “under oarsman”. It came to denote any subordinate acting under the direction of another.

Luke 4:20 -- And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant (KJV - minister - *hypēretēs*), and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him.

And it’s under this definition that churches often assign the office of minister to men who are awaiting ordination.

Examples of Biblical ministry:

Matt. 4:11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister - *diakoneō* - to Him.

In Eph. 3:7, Paul refers to himself as a minister - *diakonos* - of the gospel

Eph. 6:21 - Paul calls Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister - *diakonos* - in the Lord.

Phil. 2:25 - Paul calls Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister - *leitourgos* - to my need;

Col. 1:23 - Paul again refers to himself the minister of the gospel

Col. 1:25 - Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit

Philem. 13 - - Paul calls Onesimus a minister, who ministered to Paul’s needs in Philemon’s place.

Heb. 8:2 - Jesus - our high priest - is referred to as “a minister - *leitourgos* - in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.

So, to be a minister is to be a servant. And all Christian “ministry” is therefore defined as service. As Paul said, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.” (2Cor. 4:5)

All these forms of service are referred to as “ministry” -- and the one thing they have in common is the devotion to service, to helping others, to laying down one’s life on behalf of others. (sacrificial love)

The most important principle in ministry; Give yourself away.

You cannot be self-important, egocentric, and also be a minister of Jesus Christ.

## Deacons

### **Acts 6:1-6 - HOW DEACONS CAME ABOUT**

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Laying hands is a form of ordination.

ORDAINED - Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Ordination is not the church transferring authority to the people they’ve chosen, it is a recognition of what God has already ordained by the gifts and abilities He has given to particular people.

## Gift Ministries

Jesus is not only building His church - ekklesia -- but He is providing everything necessary for the health and sustenance of His church, His body, His bride.

Ephesians 4:11-14 - And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Qualifications for Deacons and Elders are defined in the **Epistles of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.**

God gives particular people particular gifts as befits the particular office to which He has assigned them.

The qualifications for Deacons and Elders similar:

**READ FROM 1 Timothy 3:1-13**

Notice differences and similarities in the characteristics and requirements for each office.

#### Office of bishop:

The Greek word for bishops is "*episkopos*." The same word is also translated "overseer." In the New Testament there was a bishop in every church, tasked with the work of watching over the church, guiding it and seeing to its general health and well-being.

Now, these same men, serving in this same office of bishop/overseer, were also called "elders" - or "*presbuteros*" - in Acts 20:17. This is made obvious when you compare Acts 20:28 where these elders are called overseers.

"And from Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus, and called the **elders** of the church." (Acts 20:17-18)

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you **overseers**, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)

In other words, bishop, elder and overseer are one and the same office. Then we find pastors. They really only show up in Ephesians 4:11. In the Greek they are called "*poimen*," or "shepherds."

According to Vine's Expository Greek dictionary, "pastors guide as well as feed the flock ... this involves tender care and vigilant superintendence." But importantly, Acts 20:28 refers to "overseers" as those who tend to and feed the flock. So, in Paul's perspective, bishops/overseers are the same thing as pastors.

And, bishops/overseers are the same thing as elders. The words are interchangeable. They each indicate some aspect of the job. They do not designate individual offices held by separate men within a local church.

Consequently, the requirements for elders, bishops, overseers and pastors are all exactly the same because pastors are elders. In our modern church structure it is more common to find a plurality of elders who act as officers of the church and one man who acts as pastor. But in reality, any man who is ordained an elder ought to have the ability, willingness and gifts to pastor. Men who operate within a church as officers, caring for the day-to-day business and making decisions concerning the physical structure and organization are acting as deacons, not elders.

### Husband of one wife:

The phrase "husband of one wife" was a common Greek phrase, used in many documents outside of Scripture, so Greek grammarians have a good handle on what it meant in everyday usage.

The phrase "husband of one wife" has to do with the character of the man being considered for the office of overseer/bishop/elder/pastor or deacon. It is best translated "a one-woman type of man."

The New American Standard Version tries to emphasize this idea by rendering the phrase, "husbands of only one wife." They add the word "only" to the text in order to bring out the idea that Paul was speaking against polygamy. The NIV adds the word "but," rendering the phrase, "husband of but one wife." Both of those translations are attempting to bring out Paul's real meaning.

It was common for Middle Eastern men to have multiple wives and to divorce them and add new wives at will. That is a character issue. Such men should not lead in the Church. But, what type should? If he is a man committed to one woman at any given time, then he is "a one-woman type of man." His commitment to one woman bespeaks his character.

Now - and this is important - Paul was familiar with the word "*chorizo*," which is translated "depart" in the KJV version of 1 Corinthians 7:10:

"And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife **depart** from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." (1 Cor. 7:10-11)

Other translations render the word "*chorizo*" as "divorce." And, that's exactly what "divorce" means; to depart, or put distance between two people - "*chorizo*." Paul knew how to use that word and wrote about the different situations that might

arise when believers were married to unbelievers. He understood that people might leave and divorces might happen.

"But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches." (1 Cor. 7:12-17)

So, here's my point. Paul knew the language of divorce and wrote about it. Yet, when Paul listed the qualifications for elders/bishops/overseers/pastors and deacons, he did not make any reference to divorce. He was concerned primarily with character issues - the type of man he was - and whether he had been evidently gifted by God to fill that office ("not a novice ... apt to teach"). If Paul had meant to convey the message that pastors, elders or the like could not be divorced, it seems to me that he would have mentioned it in the list of qualifications.

Again, He does use that language in other letters. Paul is familiar with the word "divorce." It certainly seems that he would have included it in his list if that is what he meant to say. But, he didn't. Instead, he referred to a man who was not a bigamist, not marrying multiple women concurrently or all at once. In short, not a womanizer; the same way he was not to be a brawler, a drinker, a striker, greedy or covetous. These were matters of character and giftedness.

### **Apt to teach.**

Teach: didasko. Teacher: didaskalos. Doctrine: didaskalia.

What are we to teach? Sound Doctrine:

1Tim 1:3-5 -- As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines (heterodisaskaleo), nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.



1Tim 4:1 -- But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

1Tim 4:6-9 -- In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

1Tim 4:13 - Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

1Tim. 4:16 -- Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

1Tim. 5:17 -- Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

1Tim. 6:1 -- Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against.

1Tim. 6:3-5 -- If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

2Tim. 1:13-14 -- Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

2Tim. 2:2 -- And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

2Tim. 2:14-15 -- Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

2Tim. 4:1-4 -- I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

Titus 1:7-9 -- For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Titus 2:1 - But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

Titus 2:7-8 -- in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

2Tim. 2:24-26 -- And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Paul was so serious about this that he even cursed those who would "pervert" the gospel.

Gal. 1:6 - 9 -- I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

You only get to use that verse if you are preaching the same doctrine Paul taught.

### **Warnings:**

James 3:1 -- Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.

1Pet. 5:1-7 - Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be

revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (5) You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, loathe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.