

Chapter 47A Church Government
 How Should a Church be Governed?
 How Should Church Officers be Chosen?

- A. Church Officers--*Definition*: A church officer is someone who has been publicly recognized as having the right and responsibility to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church
1. Apostle (Greek *apostolos*, "one who is sent")
 - a. "Messenger," used in the broad sense (3 times in NT: Phil. 2:25, 2 Cor. 8:23, John 13:16)
 - b. In narrow sense, as an "apostle of Jesus Christ."
 - this is the much more common meaning in NT (77 times in NT)
 - Apostles had authority (1) to write and/or authorize the NT Scriptures as the word of God [see chapter 3 on canon of NT], and (2) to govern the church with divine authority (1 Cor. 7:17; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:14)
 - c. The NT provides two qualifications for an apostle in this narrow sense:
 - (1) An eye-witness to Jesus after his resurrection (Acts 1:22, Acts 1:2-3, 1 Cor 9:1, 1 Cor 15:7-9)
 - (2) Having been specifically commissioned by Jesus as an apostle (Matt 10:1-7, Acts 1:24-26, Acts 26:16-17, Rom 1:1)
 - d. Who was an apostle?
 - (1) Eleven original disciples who remained after Judas died, plus Matthias, who replaced Judas (Acts 1:26)
 - (2) Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:14)
 - (3) James (Gal 1:19)
 - (4) Others? (probably not Rom 16:7)
 - (5) Paul was the last apostle (1 Cor 15:5-9)
 - e. There are no more apostles today – none after the time of the NT
 - f. What replaced the apostles?
 2. Elder (Pastor/Bishop/Overseer)
 - a. Plural Elders: The pattern in all NT churches (Acts 14:23, 20:17, Titus 1:5, James 5:14, 1 Peter 5:1-2).
 - (1) No passage suggests that any church had one elder.
 - (2) Not diversity of forms in NT churches, but a unified and consistent pattern
 - b. Other names for elders:
 - (1) Pastor/shepherd (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter. 5:2-4)
 - (2) Overseer/bishop (1 Tim. 3:1-2, Titus 1:5-7)
 - c. The function of elders.
 - (1) Govern the church (1 Tim. 5:7, 1 Tim. 3:4-5); not to rule harshly (1 Peter 5:2-5, Heb. 13:17)
 - (2) Teaching responsibilities (Eph. 4:11, 1 Tim. 3:2, 1 Tim. 5:17)
 - d. Qualifications of elders: When Paul lists the qualifications for elders, it is significant that he combines requirements concerning character traits and heart attitudes with requirements that cannot be fulfilled in a short time but will only become evident over a period of several years of faithful Christian living (1 Tim. 3:2-7, Titus 1:6-9)
 - e. What is the meaning of "having one wife"? (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6). Probably Paul was preventing a polygamist from being an elder:
 - (1) All other conditions refer to a man's present status
 - (2) Paul could have said "having been married only once" but he did not
 - (3) We should not prevent remarried widowers from being elders
 - f. The public installation of elders (1 Tim. 3:10, 1 Tim. 5:17-22; note: Acts 6:6, Acts 13:3)
 3. Deacon: literally, a servant (Greek *diakonos*, "servant"): (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-6, Rom. 16:1-2)—a variety of administrative and serving responsibilities within the church
 4. Other Offices: Treasurer, Moderator, Trustees, Paid Staff (Music, Education, Youth)
- B. How Should Church Officers Be Chosen?
1. One solution: Selection by a Higher Authority (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist churches do this)
 2. The other solution: Selection by the local congregation.
 - a. Reasons why church officers should be affirmed/recognized by a congregation.
 - (1) NT evidence for selection by a local congregation (Acts 1:23, Acts 6:3, Acts 15:22, 2 Cor. 8:19, Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5 – note: the word "appoint" may also mean to install").
 - (2) In the NT final governing authority seems to rest with the whole church, not a group outside the church (Matt. 18:17, 1 Cor. 5:4); the Epistles are written to churches, not to elders (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1, etc.).
 - (3) Greater accountability by selection from a congregation (1 Tim. 5:19)
 - (4) Historically, false doctrine seems to be adopted by theologians of the church first, the pastors second, and the informed laity who read their Bible daily and walk the Lord, last!

(5) Government works best when it has the consent of those governed: (Ex. 4:29-31; 1 Sam. 7:5-6; 10:24; 2 Sam. 2:4; 1 Kings 1:39-40; and note the mistake of Rehoboam in 1 Kings 12:1, 15).

b. Summary: Although Scripture does not explicitly command one specific system of choosing church officers, it would seem most wise to have a system whereby the entire church has a significant role in the selection of church officers

C. Church Government: 3 main kinds.

1. Episcopalian.

- An archbishop has authority over many bishops.
- Bishops have authority over a "diocese," which simply means the churches under the jurisdiction of a bishop.
- Rector: the officer in charge of a local parish. Rectors often have an assistant called a "vicar"

2. Presbyterian.

- Each local church elects elders to a "session" (the pastor will be one of these elders).
- This session has governing authority over the local church.
- The members of the session (the elders) are also members of a regional "presbytery," which has authority over several churches in a region. Arguments in favor of a Presbyterian government:

3. Congregational (Five Types).

a. Single Elder (Single Pastor).

- Congregation elects the pastor and also elects the deacons.
- Pastoral authority varies from church to church, and will generally increase the longer a pastor remains in a church.
- The authority of the deacon board is often thought to be merely an advisory authority.

***Alternative: In actual practice the "single elder" system can change and *function* more like a "plural elders" government.

b. Plural Local Elders.

- Elders govern the church and have authority to rule (elder board)
- The "pastor" (or "senior pastor") exists as one of the elders
- Pastor has opportunity to lead within the group of elders.
- The pastor does not have authority on his own over the congregation

c. Corporate Board.

- Patterned after a modern corporation
- Board of directors hires an executive officer who then has authority to run the business as he sees fit.
- No NT precedent exists.
- Deprives the pastor of sharing in the ruling authority.
- Pastor often has difficulty exercising spiritual authority over the members of the board, who in this system, would be his boss.

d. Pure Democracy.

- Takes congregational church government to its logical extreme.
- *Everything* must come to the congregational meeting.
- Decision-making is extremely difficult.
- Unfaithful to the NT pattern of elder authority

e. No Government, but the Holy Spirit.

- Church denies that any form of government is needed.
- Unfaithful to the NT pattern of designated elders with governing authority
- Subjective feelings rather than wisdom and reason prevail

Conclusions:

1. The form of government adopted by a church is not a major point of doctrine.

2. But a church can be *more pure* or *less pure* on this point, as in other areas.

a. With good people in place, various systems can work well

b. But a form of government faithful to the NT pattern serves to protect the church from going astray over time, and to protect it in times of difficulty and conflict. (When there is controversy in a church, the form of government can become extremely important, and can often be the decisive factor in determining the future of that church.)

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