

Christian Doctrine

The Church (Part 3)

Church Government and Officers

Church Government

God intended the church to be run in an orderly fashion. Throughout church history, three main forms of church government have developed to help direct the church:

- Episcopalian: Made of a hierarchy where clergy is organized into ranks. An archbishop has authority over bishops, bishops supervise several churches (called diocese), churches are cared for by priests and deacons (who are ordained by the bishops).
- Presbyterian: Churches elect elders to a session which governs the church. The session answers to a presbytery which oversees all the churches in a certain area. Synods and the General Assembly are higher bodies that handle other church matters.
- Congregational: Individual members of each local church have equal say in making decisions for the church. The church is not answerable to any higher authority (other than Christ). Pastors are elected by the church as its overseer.

The early church seemed to model a congregational form of government. This is seen in how they:

- > Chose their own leaders ([Acts 1:23, 26; 15:22](#)).
- > Chose their own deacons ([Acts 6:1-6](#)).
- > Carried out discipline ([Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:4-13; II Thess. 3:6, 14-15](#)).
- > Carried out ordinances ([Matt. 28:19; I Cor. 11:17-26](#)).
- > Sent out their own missionaries ([Acts 13:3; 14:26-27](#)).

Plus, the “priesthood of believers” concept seems to imply a democracy where there is a rule of the people ([I Pet. 2:5, 9](#)).

Church Officers

- Pastor: Three terms are used to refer to this position, each giving a description of the office ([Acts 20:17, 28](#)):
 - Elder: one in authority; spiritually mature ([I Pet. 5:1](#))
 - Pastor: shepherd of the flock ([Eph. 4:11](#))
 - Bishop: overseer of the work ([I Tim. 3:1](#))
- > Qualifications are listed in [I Tim. 3:1-7](#) and [Titus 1:5-9](#).
- Deacons: “servants” who assist the pastor ([Acts 6:1-6](#)).
- > Qualifications are listed in [I Tim. 3:8-13](#).