Church Polity 101

# **Government**

* **Living Organism – Body of Christ**
* **Organization – Societal Corporation**
  + The church has frequently mimicked political constructs of culture, with its strengths and flaws
  + Regulated by Scriptural Guidelines
  + God Ordained leadership
    - Spur Growth, purity, outreach, Holiness
* **Biblical Foundation for Government**:
  + First, Christ is the head of the church and its supreme authority ([Ephesians 1:22](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%201.22); [4:15](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%204.15); [Colossians 1:18](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Colossians%201.18)).
  + Second, the local church is to be autonomous, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations ([Titus 1:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus%201.5)).
  + Third, the church is to be governed by spiritual leadership consisting of two main offices—elders and deacons.
* **“Elders” were a leading body among the Israelites since the time of Moses**
  + Made political decisions ([2 Samuel 5:3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Samuel%205.3); [2 Samuel 17:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Samuel%2017.4), [15](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Samuel%2017.15))
  + Advised the king in later history ([1 Kings 20:7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%2020.7))
  + Represented the people concerning spiritual matters ([Exodus 7:17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exodus%207.17); [24:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exodus%2024.1), [9](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exodus%2024.9); [Numbers 11:16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%2011.16), [24-25](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%2011.24-25))
  + The early Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, used the Greek word presbuteros for “elder.” This is the same Greek word used in the New Testament that is also translated “elder.”
* **Elders in The New Testament**
  + In the Jerusalem church, elders were part of the leadership along with the apostles ([Acts 15:2-16:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.2-16.4))
  + They served in the role of church leadership ([Acts 14:23](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2014.23), [15:2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.2), [20:17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2020.17); [Titus 1:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus%201.5); [James 5:14](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%205.14))
  + Apparently each church had more than one, as the word is usually found in the plural
  + Some cases one elder singled out for some reason ([1 Timothy 5:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Timothy%205.1), [19](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Timothy%205.19))
  + Elder was equal to the position of episkopos, translated “overseer” or “bishop” ([Acts 11:30](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2011.30); [1 Timothy 5:17](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Timothy%205.17)). The term “elder” may refer to the dignity of the office, while the term “bishop/overseer” describes its authority and duties ([1 Peter 2:25](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Peter%202.25), [5:1-4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Peter%205.1-4)). In [Philippians 1:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Philippians%201.1),
  + Paul greets the bishops and deacons but does not mention the elders, presumably because the elders are the same as the bishops.
  + Likewise, [1 Timothy 3:2](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Timothy%203.2), [8](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Timothy%203.8) gives the qualifications of bishops and deacons but not of elders.
    - [Titus 1:5-7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Titus%201.5-7) seems also to tie these two terms together.
* **Deacons**
  + The position of “deacon,” from diakonos, means “through the dirt,”
  + Servant leadership to the church
  + Deacons are separate from elders, while having qualifications that are in many ways similar to those of elders ([1 Timothy 3:8-13](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Timothy%203.8-13)).
  + Deacons assist the church in whatever is needed, as recorded in Acts chapter 6.
* **Pastors**
  + Concerning the word poimen, translated “pastor” in reference to a human leader of a church, it is found only once in the New Testament, in [Ephesians 4:11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%204.11): “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.”
    - Two terms “pastors” and “teachers” refer to a single position, a pastor-teacher.
      * Likely that a pastor-teacher was the spiritual shepherd of a particular local church.
* **Summary:**
  + Always a plurality of elders
    - Does not negate God’s gifting particular elders with the teaching gifts while gifting others with the gift of administration, prayer, etc. ([Romans 12:3-8](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Romans%2012.3-8); [Ephesians 4:11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%204.11)).
    - Does not negate God’s calling elders into a ministry in which they will use those gifts ([Acts 13:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2013.1)).
      * One elder may emerge as the “pastor,” another may do the majority of visiting members because he has the gift of compassion, while another may “rule” in the sense of handling the organizational details
  + Many churches that are organized with a pastor and deacon board perform the functions of a plurality of elders in that they share the ministry load and work together in some decision making.
  + The Pastor or “teaching elder” has no more authority in decision making than does any other elder.
* **Three Primary Systems of Christian Leadership Have Evolved:**

1. **Episcopal Government**
   1. Has nothing to do with the Denomination.
      1. “Episcopal” is a derivative of the Greek word that translates into English as “bishop
      2. As early as the Apostolic Father Ignatius (the bishop of Antioch until the beginning of the 2nd century AD), solitary leadership structures flourished, and so bishop-oriented churches spread throughout the Christian world.
      3. Evidenced by the numerous writings of the church fathers, solitary church leadership (also known as episcopal church government\*) strongly correlated with the Roman Empire’s leadership. As the emperor was supreme over the physical, the bishop/elder/pastor was supreme concerning the spiritual, presiding over all others (deacons and members).
   2. Episcopal-style churches still abound today, primarily throughout the Roman Catholic Church. While this form of government does prove efficient, corruption is always a danger.
2. **Congregational Government**
   1. Emphasis on the priesthood of every believer, congregational church government has dominated the Protestant church.
   2. “Democratic” culture reflection
   3. 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.
   4. Divisiveness can be a negative result of this format, but the added accountability can stave off blatant corruption.
3. **Presbyterian Government**
   1. Nothing to do with the Denomination
   2. “Presbyterian” is a derivative of the Greek word for “elder.”
   3. Simply means church is lead by the eldership (who are supported by the deacons).
      1. The church body likely has limited say into the major decisions of the church, but those who meet the biblical qualifications for leadership share the weight of power.
   4. Though this system can foster a “them and us” attitude between the congregation and the elders, it produces a balanced level of efficiency and accountability.
4. ***Pinnacle maintains system similar to a Presbyterian-style of church leadership because we believe that this structure is biblically preferable.*** Using the terms elder and bishop interchangeably, the church government described and commissioned in the early church was marked by a plurality of elders (Titus 1:5-7; Acts 11:30; 14:23; 20:17-18; Philippians 1:1).
5. **Congregational Role:**
   1. “Dictator” leader who makes the decisions (whether called elder, or bishop, or pastor) is unscriptural ([Acts 1:23](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%201.23), [26](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%201.26); [6:3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%206.3), [5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%206.5); [15:22](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.22), [30](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2015.30); [2 Corinthians 8:19](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Corinthians%208.19)).
   2. So, too, is a congregation-ruled church that does not give weight to the elders’ or church leaders’ input.