

Chapter 14

THE STRUCTURE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Importantly, the Apostolic letters in the New Testament say little about the structure of the government of the church. This lack of specificity regarding the formation of the government is a wonderful feature of Christianity in that it allows sufficient flexibility to create church policies that can minister to any culture at any time.

BIBLICAL CHURCH STRUCTURE

Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). He performs this duty as he sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Hebrews 8:1; Ephesians 2:21-23). Christians are members of the church, each performing different functions to create a complete functional body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). However, each individual Christian is still responsible for becoming holy as God is holy in their individual Christian walk. For example, practicing the five tools to maturity such as prayer, praise, outreach, and fellowship while adhering to the truth of God's word (Acts 2:42,47).

The Bible specifies several leadership positions within the local church with the understanding that each local church is part of the universal body of Christ.

ELDERS / BISHOPS

These leaders direct the church. The number of elders is flexible as well as their function. Two Greek words describe the elder in the Bible, presbyteros (Gr, πρεσβυτερος) signifying an older, mature, and wise person, and episkopos (Gr, ἐπίσκοπος) as one who audits or acts as overseer. Guidelines for selecting elders are in Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-10. These qualities are listed below

QUALITIES OF ELDERS AND BISHOPS

*BASED ON TIMOTHY 3:1-7
and TITUS 1:5-10*

- Be blameless
- Having one wife
- Vigilant
- Sober
- Showing good behavior
- Hospitable
- Able to teach
- Not given to wine
- Not a striker
- Not greedy
- Not given to filthy lucre
- Patient
- Not a brawler
- Not covetous
- Rules his house well
- Not a new believer
- Good report from those outside the church
- Faithful children not of riot or unruly
- Not self-willed
- Not easy to anger
- Lover of good
- Just
- Holy
- Temperate
- Faithful to God's Word

DEACONS

This position appears to serve underneath the elders although the Bible does not state this explicitly. However, the elders lead the church, so it implies the deacons are subordinated to the elders. Their exact duties also are not mentioned so these can be developed as needed by the elder board. Their selection criteria are detailed in [1 Timothy 3:8-13](#). These qualities are listed below

QUALITIES OF DEACONS

BASED ON TIMOTHY 3:8 - 13

- Grave
- Not double-tongued
- Not given to much wine
- Not greedy of filthy lucre
- Hold mystery of faith in pure conscience
- Be proven before being a deacon
- Blameless
- One wife
- Rule children and house well
- Boldness in faith

WOMEN SERVANT

Although the meaning of this verse is controversial, in context, it seems to indicate that women were given some official position in the church in which they could serve [1 Timothy 3:11](#). [1 Timothy 2:12](#) notes a woman should not have authority over a man in the church worship service. Therefore, the Bible appears to allow women to serve in positions specified by the elders and consistent with scripture. These qualities are listed below

QUALITIES OF WOMEN SERVANTS

*BASED ON 1 TIMOTHY 3:11 and
1 TIMOTHY 2:12*

- Grave
- Not slanderers
- Sober
- Faithful

No other specific positions are described. However, the elder board can develop additional positions as needed to assist their church.

GENERAL DENOMINATIONAL GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES

Church denominations have differing governmental structures. These structures in part define the denomination itself. Generally, there are three basic types of church governmental structures.

- **Hierarchical** - This governmental structure includes a head of the denomination and then below them bishops, typically at different geographical locations. The bishops are usually the pastors of individual congregations. Examples of a hierarchical government are the Roman Catholics and Methodists.
- **Congregational** – Although these denominations may have a head office, individual congregations ideally act as an independent body. Each church typically has just one elder who also is the head pastor. Serving under him is a board of deacons who help direct the church. Major decisions within the church are generally approved by a vote from the congregation. Examples of congregational governments are the Congregationalists and Baptists.
- **Federal** – This type of government is typically led by a board of elders of whom the pastor is one of its members. Generally, new elders are appointed by the board of elders although suggestions might be taken from the congregation. The church may or may not have deacons. Examples of a federal government are the Presbyterians and many independent Bible-believing churches.

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