

The Importance of Biblical Church Government

Introduction: Who cares? What difference does it make?

I. Types of Church Government

A. Grouped by types of *authority* of its officers

1. **Benevolent Dictatorships** (Many independent churches, some parachurch ministries, World Wide Church of God, Roman Catholic, etc.)
2. **Oligarchies** (Many parachurch ministries; many cults; some evangelical denominations)
3. **Democracies** (Some Baptist churches, some Independent churches)
4. **Theocratic Republics** (Presbyterian, Reformed)
 - a) Christ is the only sovereign head of the church (Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 5:2-4), and His Word alone can be the authority of the church
 - b) The local church elects its own officers (6:5,6; 14:23)
 - (1) Deacons: 6:5,6
 - (2) Elders: The Greek word *cheirotoneantes* means literally “had elected by a show of hands.” (Acts 14:23; see same word used in 2 Cor. 8:19)
 - c) There are only two offices in the church: bishop and deacon (Phil 1:1).
 - d) There is parity of authority among all those who rule. The word “Elders” and “Bishops” (=overseers) are two words for the same office, with elder focusing on maturity and bishop focusing on function (Titus. 1:5-7; Acts 20:17-28; Phil. 1:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:1-3)
 - e) Each church should eventually have a plurality of elders, and until that happens, the church planter (like Titus) is under the authority of a commission from another church or Presbytery (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5-16)
 - f) Ordination is the act of a Presbytery (body of elders) or a commission of a body of elders (1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 13:1-3; 6:6; 14:23)
 - g) Appeal to a broader group of elders is possible (Acts 15) and the Biblical judgment is binding on the church as a whole (Acts 16:4). Even Paul did not have authority to impose a decision without right of appeal (Acts 15:1-2).
 - (1) Presbytery at Antioch considered controversy (v. 2)
 - (2) When no decision was satisfactory, a broader group of officers were appealed to for deliberation (v. 2)
 - (3) The multitude at Jerusalem silently observed in this open meeting (v. 12) while the elders deliberated.
 - (4) The judgment was the judgment of a court with authority (“decrees”) and was made by officers. It was not a democracy, but operated as a republic.

B. Grouped by the *accountability* of its officers

1. Hierarchical (Episcopal, Methodist)
 - a. Accountable to God
 - b. Accountable to officers above (unless you are the head)
2. Democratic (various)
 - a. Accountable to God

- b. Accountable to congregation
 - 3. Pastor run
 - a. Accountable to God
 - 4. Republican (Presbyterian, various Reformed)
 - a. Accountable to God
 - b. Accountable to Presbytery
 - c. Accountable to congregation
 - C. Grouped by *leadership style*
 - 1. Military style with magisterial power (Many older missions organizations, Shepherding movement, some Episcopal type denominations, one man CEO type churches)
 - 2. Coaching with strongly persuasive style (PDI, Covenant Association)
 - 3. Theocratic Republicanism with ministerial (as opposed to magisterial) power
 - D. Grouped by *enumerated powers*
 - 1. Constitution is largely procedural – no enumerated powers
 - 2. Constitution is controlling – enumerated powers.
- II. The Extent of Church Authority
- A. Enumerated powers
 - B. Delegated powers
 - C. Limited powers
 - D. Separation of powers: family authority is distinct from church authority
 - E. Ministerial authority, not legislative authority. God's law alone is sovereign. Government derives its power from Christ. "In Christ's Church, Christ's voice alone is to be heard."
 - F. Civil constitutions have no power in the courts of the church. Ecclesiastical courts have no authority in civil government.