

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH — How Is The Church To Be Organized?

EXTERNAL ORGANIZATION.

I. INDEPENDENCE.

- A. General Description — Two Specific Marks of Autonomy: (1) All local churches have their own independent leadership structure; & (2) Local Churches are treated differently.
- B. Modern Examples: *Churches Which Do Not Have Independence*: Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, PCUSA, PCA, (RCC, Orthodox), Etc. — *Churches Which Have Limited Independence*: Calvary Chapels, Grace Brethren, EFCA, Southern Baptist, Etc. — *Churches With Absolute Independence*: Independent Baptist Churches, Bible Churches, Community Churches.

II. INTERDEPENDENCE.

- A. General Description — Assistance to accomplish certain things.
- B. Modern Examples: Missionary Support, Bible Colleges, other parachurch Ministries.

III. EXAMPLE OF INDEPENDENCE WITH INTERDEPENDENCE. Acts 15

INTERNAL ORGANIZATION.

I. TWO ASPECTS OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION: REGULAR & OCCASIONAL

- A. The Church's Regular Organization — Statutory.
- B. The Church's Occasional Organization — Practical, as Needed.

II. VARIOUS APPROACHES TO CHURCH GOVERNMENT/ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE.

- A. Episcopal or Hierarchical Model — A Bishop governs all the churches in his charge. (Examples: Roman Catholic Church, Methodist, Lutheran).
- B. The Federal or Presbytery Model — The Elders of the church are given the authority to govern the affairs of the church. (Examples: Presbyterian Churches, some Independent Churches (non-denominational), some Bible Churches and some Baptist Churches).
- C. The Congregational Model — All authority is vested in the congregation to make any and all decisions (no decision is too great or too small). (Examples: The Evangelical Free Church of American, Disciples of Christ, some Bible and Baptist churches)
- D. The Lone Pastor Model — There is only one pastor and all the authority of the church is vested in him. (Examples: Some Baptist and independent churches; very prevalent among Black Churches)
- E. The National Church Model — The church is controlled by the leaders of the country or the head of state, such as the monarch. (Examples: Church of England, State Churches of Scandinavia, etc)
- F. The No Government Model — There is no formal government or leadership structure. (Examples: Mennonites, some Brethren, some Amish)
- G. Honorable Mention — Moses Model. (Example: Calvary Chapel Churches)

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT'S TESTIMONY

A. The Leaders.

- 3 Terms: *Elder* (*presbuterios*); *Bishop/Overseer* (*episkopos*); and *Pastor/Shepherd* (*poimen*).
 - 3 Different Aspect of the Leaders: *Elder* — Speaks of a respected status, it is an identity word; *Bishop/Overseer* — Speaks of their relationship to other, having responsibility for and authority over; and *Pastor/Shepherd* — Speaks of activity.
1. Shepherd or Pastor (18 x's Mt 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; Mk 6:34; 14:27; Lk 2:8, 15, 18, 20; Jn 10:2, 11-12, 14, 16; 1Pt 2:25; Eph 4:11; Heb 13:20) — **3 times is it used in relation to the church** (Eph 4:11; Heb 13:20; 1Pt 2:25).
 - a) The **verb**, (11 x's; Matt. 2:6; Luke 17:7; John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 9:7; 1 Pet. 5:2; Jude 1:12; Rev. 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15); **only 2 are clearly related to church leadership** (Acts 20:28; 1Pt 5:2) and 1 other possibly (Jn 21:16).
 - b) **Summary** — So the term "**pastor/shepherd**" and its related verb are only used 5 times (possibly 6) in relation to the Church. Not a common reference for the leadership of the Church. (Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11; Heb 13:20; 1Pt 2:25; 5:2): Eph 4:11 — used in reference to the universal church; Heb 13:20 & 1Pt 2:25 — used of Jesus Christ; and Acts 20:28 & 1Pt 5:2 — used for the activity of an elder. It is a word that describes activity.
 2. Overseer or Bishop (*episkopos*; 5 x's; Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 2:25); **only 4 refer to the position of leadership in a local church**, the other (1Pt 2:25) is referring to Jesus Christ.
 - a) The **verb form** of this word (*episkopeō*) is only **used 2 times** (Heb 12:15; 1Pt 5:2), and only one of these is in reference to church leadership (1Pt 5:2).
 - b) Another related term is translated as "visitation," "office," or "office/position of overseer" (4 x's): Lk 19:44 & 1Pt 2:12 — "visitation"; Acts 1:20 — "office"; and 1Tim 3:1 — "office/position of overseer."
 - c) **Summary** — The term "overseer/bishop" and its related verb and other noun, refer to the leadership of the local church 6 times — 4 to the person in leadership, 1 to the activity of overseeing, and 1 to the office of overseer. So while this word can be used as a title or word for identity, it is really emphasizing the responsibility and authority of the church leader.

3. **Elder** (presbuteros; 67 times, 16 of which refer to the leadership of a local church)

a) This word refers to **4 different groups of people**:

- (1) Elders of the Jews — 31 times (Mt 15:2; 16:21; 21:23; 26:3, 47, 57, 59; 27:1, 3, 12, 20, 41; 28:12; Mk 7:3, 5; 8:31; 11:27; 14:43, 53; 15:1; Lk 7:3; 9:22; 20:1; 22:52; Acts 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12; 23:14; 24:1; 25:15).
- (2) The 24 Elders of Revelation — 12 times (Rev. 4:4,10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4).
- (3) An older person — 8 times (Lk 15:25; Jn 8:9; Acts 2:17; 1Tm 5:1, 2; 1Pet. 5:5; 2Jn 1; 3Jn 1).
- (4) The leaders of a local church — 16 times (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1Tm 5:17, 19; Tit 1:5; Heb 11:2; Jam 5:14; 1Pt 5:1).
- (5) **Summary** — Elder is the most common way that the NT refers to the leaders of a local church; It is always in the plural and church in the singular except for 1 times (1Tm 5:19); it is the term of Identity.

B. The Servants (*Diakonos*; rare)

1. It is clearly used of an official position in a local church in Phil 1:1 & 1Tm 3.
2. The function of a "deacon" — to serve or assist.
3. The curious case of Acts 6.

C. Congregation (or Church Membership)

1. **Definition** — The Congregation is anyone in the church who is not an Elder or deacon.
2. **Function** — The congregation is the action arm of the church.