

Church Government

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Churches throughout history have developed many different forms of church government. These range from congregationalism to the hierarchical system of Roman Catholicism, from totally independent congregations to worldwide communions of churches.
- 1.2. This topic is important, but not essential doctrine. If a group errs on the doctrine of the Trinity or the Deity of Christ, they cease to be a valid church. However, if they move from one form of Church government to another, their status as a valid congregation is not affected. This is true for several reasons:
 - 1.2.1. The doctrine itself is simply not essential. It does not rise to the level of importance of these other doctrines.
 - 1.2.2. The Scripture is not as clear on this doctrine as on these other questions, and seems to leave room for different churches to have different systems. As we will see, it gives a fair amount of information on certain questions (the character qualifications which leaders must possess, the general pattern of multiple elders in a congregation) and less on other questions (exactly what do deacons do, how do elders relate to one another in leading the church, what is the relationship between local congregations).
 - 1.2.3. Each of the possible forms of church government have strengths and weaknesses, due to the inherent problems of living in a fallen world.

2. Church officers

- 2.1. Definition - A church officer is someone who has been publicly recognized as having the right and responsibility to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church.
 - 2.1.1. According to this definition, elders, deacons, and even church treasurers are officers.
 - 2.1.2. This means that not all “officers” exercise governing authority. For example, elders exercise governing authority, but deacons and church treasurers do not.
 - 2.1.3. Additionally, some of these “officers” (elders and deacons) are specifically listed in the Scripture, but others (church treasurer) are not.
 - 2.1.4. The key idea for Grudem is that if the effective accomplishment of a particular function requires public recognition, then the person would be an officer.
 - 2.1.5. At BRCC we do not really call people “officers” and do not recognize many of these functions that Grudem would include. Yet, we do have people given the authority and responsibility to oversee various ministry functions. This is necessary if the church is to function well.

3. Apostles

- 3.1. At its most basic, the Greek word for apostle (ἀπόστολος) means one who is sent - a messenger, ambassador or delegate.
- 3.2. In the New Testament, the word “apostle” is used in at least three distinct senses.
 - 3.2.1. Apostle may refer to one who is a messenger or representative sent out by a local congregation.
 - 3.2.1.1. Philippians 2:25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your **messenger**, whom you sent to take care of my needs.
 - 3.2.1.2. 2 Corinthians 8:23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brothers, they are **representatives** of the churches and an honor to Christ.
 - 3.2.1.3. These people are simply temporary representatives of a local congregation, and they have no special spiritual status or governmental authority.
 - 3.2.2. Apostle may refer to early church planters, particularly those who accompanied Paul on his journeys.
 - 3.2.2.1. 1 Thessalonians 2:6–7 ⁶ We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. **As apostles of Christ we** could have been a burden to you, ⁷ but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.
 - 3.2.2.1.1. Note Paul refers to apostles in the plural, speaking of himself, Silas, and Timothy (see 1 Thessalonians 1:1).
 - 3.2.2.1.2. I disagree with Grudem’s understanding of this verse that he expresses on 909.
 - 3.2.2.2. Acts 14:14 But when **the apostles Barnabas and Paul** heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:
 - 3.2.2.3. Once again, there is not hint in the New Testament that Silas, Timothy, or even Barnabas were viewed as having a special office like Peter and the rest of the Twelve and Paul. Rather, the term ‘apostle’ refers to their function rather than a governmental office.
 - 3.2.3. Apostle in the New Testament became a technical term to refer in a specific way to the Twelve plus Paul and James - those who were specifically commissioned by Christ and given special authority and status in the history of the church. This group is very specific, had to meet very demanding criteria/qualifications, and had a special function in the history of the Church, all of which necessitate that they were restricted to the first century - they no longer exist.

- 3.2.3.1. Qualifications/criteria
 - 3.2.3.1.1. Having visually seen Jesus after His resurrection
 - 3.2.3.1.1.1. 1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not free? **Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?** Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?
 - 3.2.3.1.1.2. 1 Corinthians 15:7–8 Then **he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also,** as to one abnormally born.
 - 3.2.3.1.1.3. Note he appeared to all the apostles, and that He appeared **last of all** to Paul. Paul is the last person to see Jesus in this way. So there can be no more apostles after Paul for he appeared to Paul “last of all” and even then is was “as to one abnormally born” since it was so late.
 - 3.2.3.1.1.4. No one alive today can possibly claim to fulfill this qualification. A “vision” of Jesus does not meet this criteria. It is seeing the actual resurrected Christ, and Paul is the last one given this sight.
 - 3.2.3.1.2. Specific appointment to the office by Christ
 - 3.2.3.1.2.1. Matthew 10:1–2 **He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority** to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve **apostles**:
 - 3.2.3.1.2.2. Acts 1:24–25 Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. **Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry,** which Judas left to go where he belongs.”
 - 3.2.3.1.2.3. Galatians 1:1–2 **Paul, an apostle — sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ** and God the Father, who raised him from the dead — ² **and all the brothers** with me, To the churches in Galatia:

3.2.3.1.2.4. Note how in every case Christ appoints the apostles. And note how Paul specifically notes this in Galatians 1:1, and makes a distinction between his status and that of his coworkers. His place among that team was unique.

3.2.3.2. Function

3.2.3.2.1. The function of the specially designated, authoritative apostles was to lay the church's foundation. Others build on this foundation, but only the apostles build the foundation, and this is done once for all.

3.2.3.2.1.1. Ephesians 2:19–20 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

3.2.3.2.1.2. Revelation 21:14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

3.2.3.2.1.3. 1 Corinthians 3:10–11 By the grace God has given me, **I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it**. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ **For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid**, which is Jesus Christ.

3.2.3.2.2. Since this foundation laying work has already been done by the original apostles (used in the narrow sense) there can be no apostles today.

3.2.4. Since no one alive since the first century can meet criteria/qualifications nor can they “re-lay” the foundation that was once for all laid in the first century, there can be no apostles today in the sense of one commissioned by Christ with great authority, gifting and governmental oversight. They simply do not exist today, and the claim to hold such an office is usually a sign of grasping after an illegitimate recognition and level of authority.

4. Elders
 - 4.1. Plural elders - the NT pattern for individual congregations
 - 4.1.1. Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed **elders for them in each church** and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.
 - 4.1.2. Acts 20:17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church.
 - 4.1.3. Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint **elders** in every town, as I directed you.
 - 4.1.4. 1 Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when **the body of elders** laid their hands on you.
 - 4.1.5. Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
 - 4.1.6. This idea of plural elders is seen in every NT reference to the leaders of a local church. There is no example of a single leader of a local church in the NT.
 - 4.2. Several titles used for elders - elder/presbyter/bishop/overseer
 - 4.2.1. Acts 20:17,28 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church....²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers (episcopos)**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.
 - 4.2.2. 1 Peter 5:1–2 To the **elders** (presbuteros) among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² **Be shepherds** (poimaino) of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** (episcopeo) ...
 - 4.2.3. Titus 1:5–7 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint **elders** (presbuteros) in every town, as I directed you. ⁶An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an **overseer** (episcopos) is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.
 - 4.2.3.1. Also note that the same list of qualifications for an elder (presbuteros) and overseer (episcopos) in Titus 1 is given for overseers/bishops (episcopos) in 1 Timothy 3:1ff.
 - 4.3. The term 'pastor' is really simply a description of what elders do, and does not refer to a special elder who has more authority than the other elders.
 - 4.3.1. The term 'pastor' (or 'shepherd' depending on the translation of the Greek word poimen) is only used to refer to a church leader one time in the whole NT - in Ephesians 4:11.
 - 4.3.1.1. Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be **pastors** and teachers,

- 4.3.2. However, the verbal form of the word - to shepherd - is used often to describe the work of elders.
- 4.3.2.1. Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. **Be shepherds (literally - Shepherd the church of God...)** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.
- 4.3.2.2. 1 Peter 5:1–2 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² **Be shepherds (literally - Shepherd God’s flock...)** of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers...
- 4.3.3. But it must be remembered that the NT does not teach a hierarchy of a group of elders who have one person - the pastor - ruling over them. Rather, all of the elders together lead the congregation.
- 4.3.4. Nonetheless, given the way the term ‘pastor’ has come to be used in our culture, people will continue to refer to elders who work on church staff as ‘pastor’ and they rarely will give that term to the other elders. While it is probably a fruitless use of time and energy to try and erase this distinction with others outside of the church, it is important that the church understand that there is no distinction between an ‘elder’ and a ‘pastor’ - they are synonymous biblically.
- 4.4. The functions of elders
- 4.4.1. To care for the local church
- 4.4.1.1. 1 Peter 5:1–3 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² **Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving** as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but **eager to serve**; ³ **not lording it over** those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.
- 4.4.1.2. Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. **Be shepherds of the church of God**, which he bought with his own blood.
- 4.4.1.3. This function is seen in the term ‘shepherd’ or ‘pastor.’
- 4.4.1.4. This function is really the overall function of elders. They primarily accomplish this call by doing the following two functions - leading and teaching.
- 4.4.2. To govern and lead the local church
- 4.4.2.1. 1 Timothy 5:17 The **elders who direct the affairs of the church** well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

- 4.4.2.2. Hebrews 13:17 **Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.**
They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.
Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
 - 4.4.2.2.1. Although this text does not specifically mention ‘elders’ it does use the shepherding metaphor (‘they keep watch over you’) and it is likely that the verse is speaking of elders.
 - 4.4.2.3. This function is also seen in the very use of the term ‘overseer.’
- 4.4.3. To teach God’s Word to the local church
 - 4.4.3.1. 1 Timothy 5:17 The **elders** who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, **especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.**
 - 4.4.3.2. 1 Timothy 3:2 Now **the overseer must be** above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach,**
 - 4.4.3.3. Titus 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, **so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.**
 - 4.4.3.4. Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and **some to be pastors and teachers,**
 - 4.4.3.4.1. There is disagreement on this point, but it appears to me (and a number of scholars), that “pastors” and “teachers” do not refer to two different people, but to the same person: pastor-teacher.
 - 4.4.3.5. This does not mean that all elders must preach at the weekly gathering of the church, but they must all be able to disciple and train others by teaching them the Scripture (in private or in public).
 - 4.4.3.6. Furthermore, it is clear from 1 Timothy 5:17 that some elders do more teaching and preaching than others. But they must all be able to teach the faith to others.
- 4.5. Qualifications for elders
 - 4.5.1. When telling Titus and Timothy how to appoint elders, but gives very similar lists of qualifications that prospective elders must meet.

- 4.5.1.1. 1 Timothy 3:2–7 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.
- 4.5.1.2. Titus 1:6–9 An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.
- 4.5.2. Notice that these lists are primarily about godly character, being well grounded in the faith, and having a heart to serve others.
- 4.5.3. Furthermore, note that these qualifications must be seen over a period of time, so that elders can not be recent converts or those immature in their faith.
- 4.5.4. We should also note what is **not** on the list - worldly fame, business success, wealth, etc. People who have these things may be elders, but these things do not qualify them to be elders, not does a lack of these things disqualify them from serving as elders.
- 4.5.5. In short, elders should be the sort of people that you want reproduced in the flock, since people will follow their example.
- 4.5.5.1. 1 Peter 5:1–3 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but **being examples to the flock**.
- 4.5.5.2. 1 Timothy 4:12 Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but **set an example for the believers** in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.
- 4.5.5.3. Titus 2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness

- 4.6. What about 'husband of one wife'?
- 4.6.1. Some understand this phrase to mean that if a man has ever been divorced, he can not be an elder.
- 4.6.2. Others hold that this refers to polygamy - a man can not be an elder if he presently has multiple wives.
- 4.6.3. I believe the best answer is that the verse is referring to polygamy. I believe this for several reasons:
- 4.6.3.1. All the other qualifications listed by Paul refer to a man's present status not his entire past life.
- 4.6.3.2. Paul could have said "having been married only once" if he had wanted to, but he did not.
- 4.6.3.3. The view that this is an absolute prohibition against anyone who has ever been divorced serving as an elder, is built on a wrong view of the Scriptures teaching on divorce and remarriage:
- 4.6.3.3.1. If the phrase is an absolute prohibition on someone who was divorced being an elder, this undermines the full forgiveness offered in the Gospel. If a man was divorced prior to being a believer, this would have no more standing on his later becoming an elder than any other sin he may have committed prior to being a believer.
- 4.6.3.3.2. This unfairly singles out divorce from all other sins. Paul himself had been a persecutor of the church and was part of Stephen's martyrdom. To say that he was still allowed to serve as an apostle, but if he had been divorced he could not have done so is to give more weight to divorce than the Scripture does.
- 4.6.3.3.3. Even if a man was divorced as a believer, it may not preclude his serving as an elder. The qualifications are about present character, not past flaws. Additionally, we believe that believers are allowed to divorce if the partner commits adultery or abandons them. Each case would be looked at individually - there is no blanket statement that anyone who has been divorced - even as a believer - could never be an elder.
- 4.6.3.3.4. In short, Scripture does allow divorce and remarriage in certain cases, and even where there has been an unbiblical divorce and remarriage, there can be forgiveness. It is not the unpardonable sin.
- 4.6.3.4. Polygamy was then - and is now in some cultures - a real issue. It was not an "empty" prohibition.

5. Deacons

- 5.1. There is much less data given about deacons in the New Testament. The only absolutely clear references to the office of deacons in the New Testament are:
 - 5.1.1. Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, **together with the overseers and deacons:**
 - 5.1.2. 1 Timothy 3:8–10 **Deacons**, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ **They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.**
 - 5.1.3. These verses clearly show that along with the elders there was another church office - that of deacons. However, they do not tell us anything more about what deacons actually do. As we saw above, the functions of elders is quite clear in the Scripture. However, these two verses tell us of the existence of deacons, and the qualifications required to be appointed as a deacon, but they do not tell us anything of the actual function of a deacon.
- 5.2. It appears that the office of deacon is based on the selection of the Seven in Acts 6:
 - 5.2.1. Acts 6:1–6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order **to wait on tables.**” ³ Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” ⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.
 - 5.2.1.1. Although the Greek noun diakonos (deacon) is not use, the verb is used to describe what the apostles would not do - wait on tables.
 - 5.2.1.2. Although some do not believe that this section of Acts describes the beginning of the diaconate in the early church, many scholars do believe that it does. I agree that it is Luke’s description of the diaconate within the early church.
- 5.3. The function of deacons
 - 5.3.1. As noted above, the Scripture does not clearly tell us exactly what deacons did in the early church. However, we can discern the basic function of deacons from two things:
 - 5.3.1.1. The word deacon itself
 - 5.3.1.1.1. The word “deacon’ literally means servant. To be a deacon was to be a servant. Therefore, deacons are those engaged in serving the church.

- 5.3.1.1.2. This is similar to what we noted about the titles given to elders. The titles of overseer and shepherd describe what elders actually do - they lead and shepherd the church.
- 5.3.1.1.3. In distinction from words used to describe elders who lead and spiritually care for the flock, the word 'deacon' itself points to practical service to the physical needs of others.
- 5.3.1.2. The example of Acts 6
 - 5.3.1.2.1. Acts 6:1–4 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."
 - 5.3.1.2.2. Note the clear distinction in Acts 6 between the spiritual ministry of the apostles - the word of God and prayer - and the practical ministry of overseeing the churches mercy ministry to its poor. This distinction seems to be carried on in the ministry of elders - prayer, the Word, and spiritual care of the flock - and that of deacons, who cared for the practical, physical needs of the flock.
- 5.3.2. From this it appears that the deacons would be given the responsibility of administering and ensuring the practical needs of the church are cared for adequately and equitably. This would certainly include benevolence/mercy ministry, but might include other things as well, as the situation dictates.
- 5.3.3. Because the Scripture gives so little data on the actual function of deacons - other than the distinction in what they do as compared to elders - local churches probably have flexibility in how the deacons actually function in a local church and exactly what practical, physical areas they are responsible for in a given congregation.
- 5.3.4. However, it is critical to state what deacons are not, and what they do not do. They are not a separate leadership group from the elders. They are not a "check and balance" to the elders. In fact, there is no hint in Scripture that deacons have any direct authority whatsoever. The elders are the authoritative, governing body of the local church. The deacons merely serve in various practical ways to care for the flock.

6. The selection and installation of elders and deacons
 - 6.1. The Scripture does not clearly indicate how elders and deacons are selected for an individual congregation.
 - 6.2. As Grudem mentions, there have been two views advocated in church history.
 - 6.2.1. Hierarchical - selection by a higher authority outside of the local church
 - 6.2.1.1. This is the system used by the Roman Catholic Church, and a few Protestant Churches such as the Church of England.
 - 6.2.1.1.1. The main argument used to support this system - apostolic succession - has no biblical warrant and carries no weight in this discussion.
 - 6.2.1.1.2. However, the practical consideration of accountability from outside of a local congregation to ensure that the local church does not go astray and that leaders over a local church can not guide the congregation into error can give some weight to this system.
 - 6.2.1.2. My main objection to this system is that it proposes a hierarchical system of church governance as the model for relationships between local churches, and I think this is not the biblical pattern. This will be discussed below.
 - 6.2.2. Congregational - selection is done by the local church itself, or by a group within the local church
 - 6.2.2.1. Some verses seem to indicate that elders were assigned by current church leaders rather than the congregation as a whole.
 - 6.2.2.1.1. Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and **appoint** elders in every town, as I directed you.
 - 6.2.2.1.2. The word for “appoint” means “to assign someone a position of authority.” It appears that Paul was telling Titus to choose the men who would serve as elders.
 - 6.2.2.1.3. One issue with this, however, is that Titus occupied a unique position as the direct representative of the Apostle Paul. No such individuals exist today, so there is no direct correlation.
 - 6.2.2.1.4. The closest current situation to this is if new elders are appointed by the existing elders.
 - 6.2.2.2. Some verses seem to indicate that that church leaders could be selected by the congregation they will lead.
 - 6.2.2.2.1. Acts 6:3 (ESV) Therefore, brothers, **pick out from among you seven men** of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will **appoint** to this duty.

- 6.2.2.2.1.1. This is speaking of choosing the Seven, who were probably the model for deacons, and were not elders. However, notice that the same verb appoint (same verb in the Greek as in Titus 1:5) is used. So here, the people chose, but the current leaders - the apostles - appointed.
- 6.2.2.2.1.2. Note that a similar pattern is actually seen in Acts 1:15-26. Qualifications were laid out, the congregation choose two possible candidates, and then lots were used (!) to determine which of the two would become an apostle. While few would propose using lots, and elders are not apostles, it is possible that the congregation selects a number of candidates, and one or more of these are then appointed to the office.
- 6.2.2.2.2. Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas **appointed elders** for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.
 - 6.2.2.2.2.1. The word for appointed here is a different Greek word that has a primary meaning of “to elect or choose someone for definite offices or tasks.” It is used this way in 2 Corinthians 8:19 - What is more, he was **chosen** by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. Thus, appointing could be done by election.
 - 6.2.2.2.2.2. However, here in Acts 14:23, it specifies that Paul and Barnabas did the choosing. Thus, it does not appear that the congregation elected these individuals, but rather that they were chosen by Paul and Barnabas.
- 6.2.3. It seems that this is an area that the Scripture does not dictate for local congregations. However, there are strengths and weaknesses to each method:
 - 6.2.3.1. Selection by the current elders or some other group within the congregation

- 6.2.3.1.1. This could lead to a lack of accountability to the congregation.
- 6.2.3.1.2. This could lead to choosing an individual that the congregation does not approve of and whom they will not eagerly follow.
- 6.2.3.1.3. However, the current elders do have a very good idea of what it takes to be an elder, and also the current needs of the eldership.
- 6.2.3.2. Selection by the whole congregation
 - 6.2.3.2.1. This could lead to elder selection becoming a popularity contest, which would be very bad for the church.
 - 6.2.3.2.2. The congregation may not know all of the details about an individual that the elders and pastoral staff may know.
 - 6.2.3.2.3. The congregation may not fully understand the requirements of eldership (what it really requires) nor what the current needs of the eldership really are.
 - 6.2.3.2.4. However, the congregation may know some people better than the elders or some select group.
 - 6.2.3.2.5. The congregation knows best who they really respect.
- 6.2.4. For these reasons, BRCC has somewhat merged the two options usually used within a congregational setting.
 - 6.2.4.1. The elders seek God and eventually select an individual who they think would serve the congregation well as an elder.
 - 6.2.4.2. The elders approach that individual (and his wife) about the possibility of becoming an elder. The individual and his family are asked to pray about the decision.
 - 6.2.4.3. If the individual decides this is something they think God has gifted them to do, they begin coming to elders (and elders and wives meetings with their spouse) over the coming months. This allows both the individual and the elders to see if the individual will function well with the current elders.
 - 6.2.4.4. If the consensus is that the person is a good fit, an announcement is made to the whole congregation. The congregation is then asked to pray and seek God, to questions the individual and his wife, and also to bring any questions, comments, or concerns to the elders. This period normally lasts a few months.
 - 6.2.4.5. If the congregation, through its questions, comments, and concerns indicates approval, the individual is set in as an elder.
 - 6.2.4.6. If the congregation does not support the person at that time, the elders and the individual work through issues that were raised, and the person is either brought forward again eventually or else they are no longer considered as a potential elder.

- 6.2.4.7. We think that this system gives the best of both possible methods, while minimizing the negatives.
- 6.2.4.8. However, it must be remembered that the Scripture gives flexibility here, so no one should be dogmatic.

7. Can women serve as elders or deacons?

7.1. BRCC does not believe that Scripture allows women to serve as elders

7.1.1. 1 Timothy 2:11–14 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.

¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

7.1.1.1. Note that there are only two specific items in view here - teaching and having authority. These are the same two functions we saw for how elders shepherd the flock - teaching and leading.

7.1.1.2. Also note that the very next verses of the letter are on the qualification for being an elder. Thus, it is clear that what is in view here is related to eldership.

7.1.1.3. Also note why the prohibition is given - because Adam was formed first. This is not a cultural issue - it is built into the very fabric of creation by God Himself.

7.1.2. 1 Corinthians 14:33–38 **As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. ³⁶Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.**

7.1.2.1. It is clear that these very strong words do not prohibit all speech by women in the church assembly, for Paul has acknowledged and encouraged women praying and prophesying in the church (see 1 Corinthians 11:5).

7.1.2.2. Notice the two categories here - speech and submission. These are the same two categories in 1 Timothy 2, just using different words. This issue is leading and teaching - the activities of elders.

7.1.3. Further, note that all of the terms related to potential elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are masculine, as is the requirement that the elder must be the husband of one wife. (Note that I am quoting the NIV2011 below, so when it uses masculine terms it is because the Greek is specific in using masculine terms.)

- 7.1.3.1. 1 Timothy 3:1–7 Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, **faithful to his wife**, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ **He** must manage **his** own family well and see that **his** children obey **him**, and **he** must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage **his** own family, how can **he** take care of God’s church?) ⁶ **He** must not be a recent convert, or **he** may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.
- 7.1.3.2. Titus 1:6–9 An elder must be blameless, **faithful to his wife**, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer manages God’s household, **he** must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather, **he** must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ **He** must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that **he** can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.
- 7.1.4. Grudem lists a number of other reasons that support these Scriptures, but they are only of secondary importance.
- 7.1.5. However, it is imperative that we state these are the only prohibitions given in Scripture. All other ministry opportunities are open to men and women, and women should be encouraged to fully participate in these activities.
- 7.2. BRCC believes that women can serve as deacons (or in all other positions other than as an elder).
- 7.2.1. As noted above, we do not believe that deacons are an authoritative position within the local church. That is reserved for elders alone. Consequently, deacons are not under view in either 1 Timothy 2:11-14, or 1 Corinthians 14:33-38.
- 7.2.2. We also believe that 1 Timothy 3:11 is referring to women who serve as deacons:
- 7.2.2.1. 1 Timothy 3:11 (NIV2011) **In the same way, the women** are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.
- 7.2.2.1.1. The NIV2011 is actually more literal here than most English translations. The Greek does not read “their wives” or “deaconesses.” It literally says “Likewise the women/wives.” The same Greek word (γυνή - gyne) means either woman or wife, depending on the context.

7.2.2.1.2. We believe that women serving as deacons are in view here. If Paul had meant to refer to deacons wives, he would normally have included the pronoun “their” but he did not. Furthermore, there is no reason why deacons wives have requirements given but not elders wives. Finally, Paul takes them up here in the middle of the requirements for deacons, because the only requirement left - being a husband of one wife and running the household well - do not apply to women deacons. All of these reasons point to the fact that in this verse it is women deacons who are in view.

7.2.3. We believe that Phoebe is listed as a woman deacon in Romans 16:1:

7.2.3.1. Romans 16:1 (NIV2011) I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **deacon** of the church in Cenchreae.

7.2.3.1.1. Many translations have the word ‘servant’ and this is possible, but the Greek word is the same word that is always used for “deacon.” And it appears that Phoebe holds some kind of official office. Consequently, we believe that she is a deacon.

7.2.3.1.2. This point is not critical, but we think it is the best way to understand this verse, and that it adds support to the idea of women deacons.

7.2.4. Finally, we would note that the ONLY prohibitions given in Scripture refer to the specific activities related to eldership - ruling and teaching the Body. Consequently, it is important that we not extend this to other areas. Thus, women can serve as deacons, youth leaders, church council members, counselors, lead women’s ministries, and freely participate in any other area of church life. If we restrict this, we are not only adding to Scripture, we are impoverishing the church!

8. Forms of Church Government

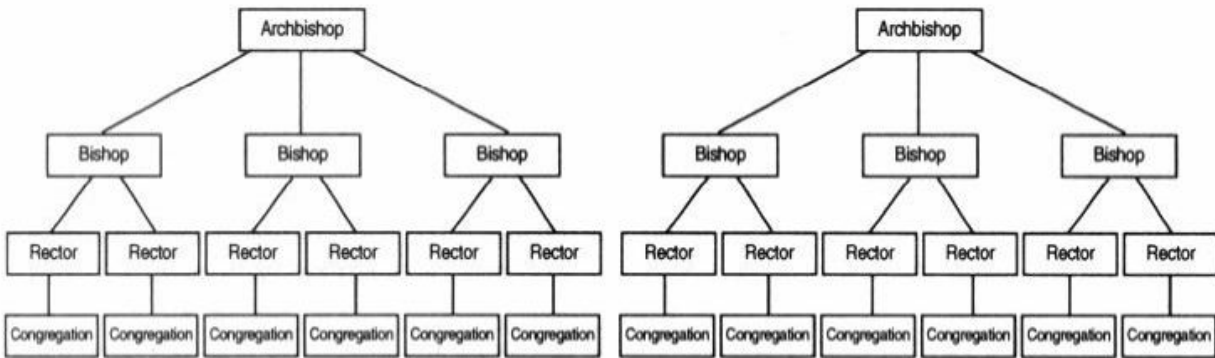
8.1. This whole discussion is closely related to the question of how leaders for a local church are selected, which we looked at in section 5 above.

8.2. There are three primary forms of church government advocated and implemented in the Church:

8.2.1. Episcopalian

8.2.1.1. This refers to a form of government where each local congregation is led by an individual known variously as a priest, vicar, or rector. Over the rector there is a bishop, who rules over a diocese, a word that refers to the churches under the jurisdiction of a single bishop. A number of bishops in turn are ruled by an archbishop. In the Eastern Orthodox and Anglican Churches, they are led (but not strictly ruled) by a single individual known as a patriarch or the Archbishop of Canterbury. In the Roman Catholic Church, all authority ultimately resides in the Archbishop of Rome, the Pope, who is the human head of the Church.

8.2.1.2. This diagram from Grudem displays this form of government:



8.2.1.3. It is not usually claimed that this form has Scriptural support. Rather, its defense is found in its early adoption in the Church, and its logical necessity for good Church order and unity. Furthermore, this system can prevent local churches from going into error.

8.2.1.4. This system is almost always tied to the notion of apostolic succession as well (which we have discussed before and determined is an unbiblical idea.)

8.2.1.5. However, the office of “bishop” in the NT is simply that of an elder in a local church, as we saw in section 4 above.

8.2.1.6. Also, as we noted in section 4, “bishops” are always plural in number in the NT. There is not NT basis for a single elder (“bishop”) having authority over other elders (“bishops”).

8.2.1.6.1. This does not mean that due to unique gifting and abilities certain elders do not gain particular prominence or influence in a local congregation (or even among a group of churches) but they should never be viewed as having greater authority.

8.2.1.7. As we have seen in previous chapters, the idea of “apostolic succession” as it is usually understood in churches with an episcopal form of church government is an unbiblical idea.

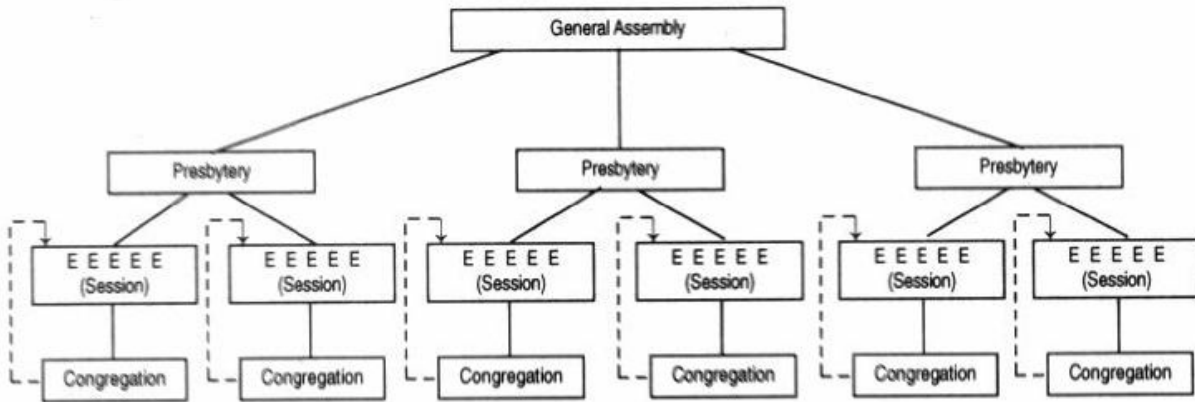
8.2.1.8. The question of whether such a system is beneficial and necessary for unity of the Church depends a good deal on whether one believes that the unity of the Church is an external, visible, governmental unity, or if it is an internal, spiritual unity. Additionally, as Church history has amply shown, the episcopalian form of government has hardly been effective at combatting schism and disunity.

8.2.1.9. Finally, Church history has shown that it is often the higher levels that stray from the faith first, and then attempt to force this upon faithful local churches. This may be seen in the corruption of the Papacy in the Middle Ages and in the grave problems in the worldwide Anglican communion today.

8.2.2. Presbyterian

8.2.2.1. In this system, elders are elected to govern the local church. This body of elders is usually known as a “session.” The “pastor” is simply one of the elders, equal in authority to the others, though usually he is the main “teaching elder.” Some or all of the elders in each session also form together with other sessions to form a local presbytery. In turn, some members of each presbytery form together to form a “general assembly.” The general assembly is the highest governing body over the denomination within a country.

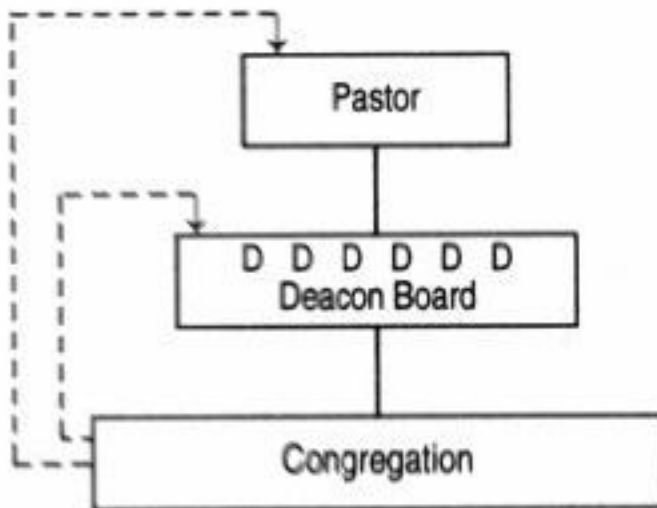
8.2.2.2. This diagram from Grudem displays this form of government:



8.2.2.3. Although this system is hierarchical in a sense, it is different from the episcopalian form of government in that authority never resides in an individual, but always in a group.

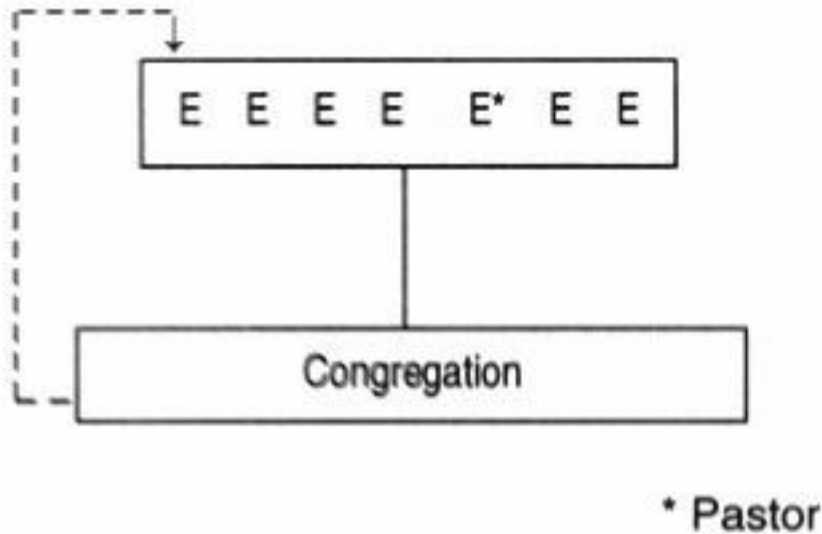
8.2.2.4. The benefits of the system are declared to be that it maintains an outward, formal unity between local churches, and that it prevents local congregations from falling into error more effectively than any other form of church government.

- 8.2.2.5. However, nowhere in the NT does it appear that elders had authority over anything other than their own local congregation. This is the major problem with this system. The only “extra-local” authority in the NT is the apostles, and they do not exist today.
 - 8.2.2.5.1. As Grudem notes, Acts 15 is not an argument against this point, for it is the presence of the Apostles that is determinative there, not the Jerusalem elders.
- 8.2.2.6. Grudem notes that this system has tended to produce a lot of factions and formal church litigation over doctrinal disputes, which often go all the way to the general assembly. This is not a healthy trend.
- 8.2.2.7. There is a great danger that the real power of church government will not reside in the local church, but in some distant assembly.
- 8.2.2.8. In practice, heresy has often come through the general assembly who has then attempted to force this upon local churches, who in order to remain faithful to Christ have had to leave and form their own denominations. One prime example of this is the Presbyterian Church in the US.
- 8.2.3. Congregational (five different forms!)
 - 8.2.3.1. Single-elder (pastor led)
 - 8.2.3.1.1. This form is very popular in Baptist churches, where the “pastor” is the only elder, and he is surrounded by an elected board of deacons.
 - 8.2.3.1.2. This diagram from Grudem displays this form of government:



- 8.2.3.1.3. How this system works in practice varies greatly from church to church. In some, the pastor has virtually all authority, especially if he founded the church or has been there for a long time. In others, the deacons have the majority of power.
 - 8.2.3.1.4. Additionally, especially in smaller congregations, many decisions must be made by congregational vote.
 - 8.2.3.1.5. The problem with this form of government is that it ignores the vast NT evidence for plural elders in each congregation. Additionally, if one individual gains too much authority, the temptation to sin is great. Prudence would seem to dictate that authority in the local church should be spread among a number of individuals rather than focused on one individual.
 - 8.2.3.1.6. On the other hand, if the whole congregation rules, the leaders really have no authority, and this presents a host of problems which will be noted in a section below on total congregational rule.
- 8.2.3.2. Plural local elders
- 8.2.3.2.1. In this system, the governing authority for the local church resides among a group of elders. One of these may be a full time worker who does most of the teaching (the “pastor” is the term often used), but this individual does not have more authority than any of the other elders, nor does he have a different office.
 - 8.2.3.2.2. However, most of the time it will be true that the full time elder who does most of the teaching will be considered the “first among equals” in the elders and within the congregation. There is no official difference between this elder and the other elders, but the influence of this elder may be slightly greater due to gifting and the fact that they devote their full time to governing. They may also have done a greater deal of study than the other elders. But any difference in this area is one which is natural rather than formal; all of the elders have equal authority in this system.

8.2.3.2.3. This diagram from Grudem displays this form of government:



8.2.3.2.4. In this system, it appears that the biblical model of multiple local elders is most closely followed, and the danger of a single individual domineering a local church is minimized, and the opportunity for multiple elders, each with different gifts, to bless a local congregation is maximized.

8.2.3.2.5. However, even in this system there is a danger of the elders as a whole exercising undue authority over a congregation. To prevent this, it is important that one or more of the safeguards listed below is followed:

8.2.3.2.5.1. The congregation should have definite input into the selection of elders, either by nomination, vote, or being given the opportunity to question and review elder candidates.

8.2.3.2.5.2. The elders should receive outside input from their wives and other sources.

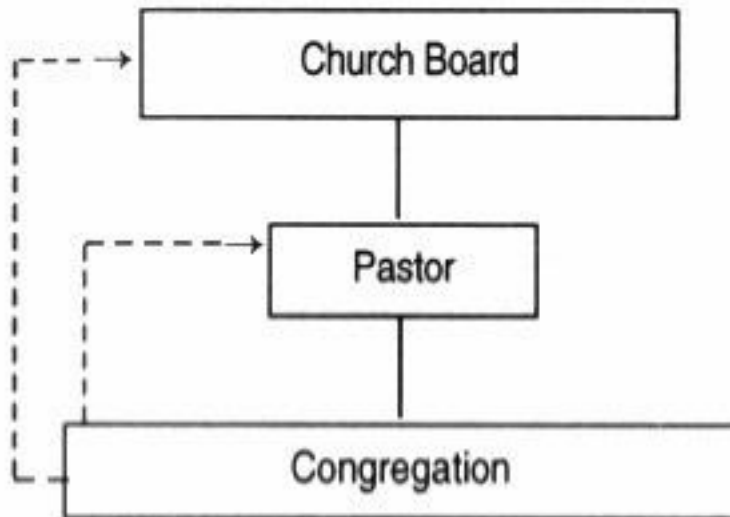
8.2.3.2.5.3. The authority of elders should never be exaggerated. Their authority is limited in both scope (they only have authority on matters given to them by the Scripture) and depth (even in areas where they have authority it is always under the authority of Christ).

- 8.2.3.2.5.4. Some important decisions should involve the whole congregation. This is mandated for excommunications (see Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:4), but prudence would dictate that the involvement and even approval of the congregation be sought in other important matters as well.
- 8.2.3.2.5.5. In many ways this system is similar to the presbyterian form of government, with the important exception that while there may be close fellowship with other churches, all governing authority resides within the local congregation.
- 8.2.3.2.5.6. This is the model of church government followed by BRCC.

8.2.3.3. Corporate board model

8.2.3.3.1. In this model church government is built like that of a modern corporation. There is a board of directors who hires an executive - the pastor - to run the church. However, the pastor is not part of the board, and all formal authority resides in the board.

8.2.3.3.2. This diagram from Grudem displays this form of government:



8.2.3.3.3. This form has worked well for many American businesses, and people are familiar with it.

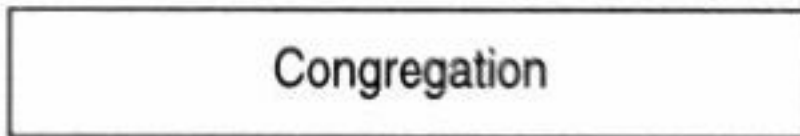
8.2.3.3.4. However, there is no NT support for such a structure.

8.2.3.3.5. This system has the fatal flaw of looking at the church like a business, and the two are VERY different. Business structures and practices are usually not only ineffective in the church, but they are usually destructive of true spiritual life and the true shepherding of a flock.

8.2.3.4. Pure democracy

8.2.3.4.1. In this system there is no real leadership by a group within the congregation. All decisions must be made by the entire congregation.

8.2.3.4.2. This diagram from Grudem displays this form of government:



8.2.3.4.3. This system is appealing to the modern American sense of democracy and individualism.

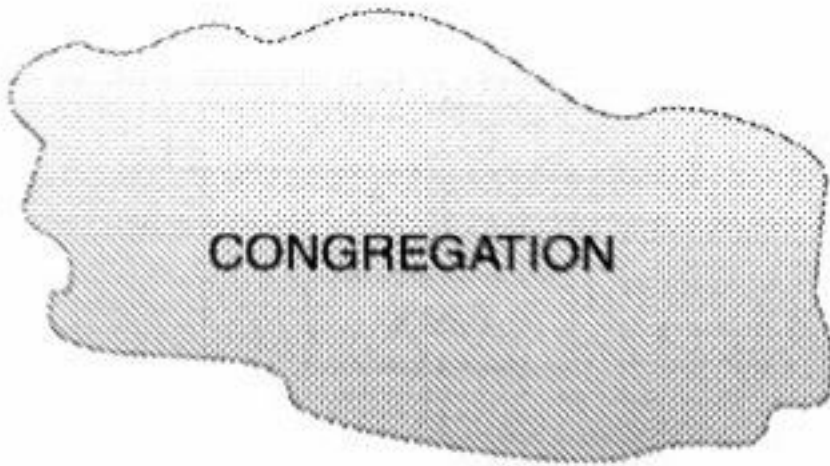
8.2.3.4.4. However, this system has no biblical support. It is clear in the Scripture that there is a group within each congregation - the elders - that have the responsibility to lead the congregation. This system ignores this clear biblical instruction.

8.2.3.4.5. This system also leads to chaos. Leadership by all is leadership by none. It is virtually impossible to make real decisions, and great disunity is usually the result.

8.2.3.5. No government but the Holy Spirit

8.2.3.5.1. This is usually argued for by hyper-spiritual groups, who claim that they do not do anything, but the Holy Spirit does everything through them.

8.2.3.5.2. This diagram from Grudem displays this form of government:



8.2.3.5.3. This is the same basic idea as “I do not interpret the Bible; the Holy Spirit tells me what it means.” It is the ultimate false spirituality, and is a complete, sinful abdication of human responsibility that God Himself clearly demands in the Scripture.

8.2.3.5.4. There is nothing to commend this system.