

Practical Theology
Church Polity

Resources: (See: <https://www.gracebible.org/practical-theology-2024-25>)

[GBC Constitution](#) Article VI, Sections A-E.

GBC Policies on [Elders](#) & [Deacons](#) & [Deaconesses](#).

[Elders – Plurality](#) & [Elder, Bishop, Pastor Word Studies](#) & [Elder Duties](#) & [Deacon Qualifications & Word Study](#) & [Divorce & Church Leaders](#) & [Deaconesses or Deacon's wives](#)

Sermons: [Biblical Qualifications for Church Leaders](#); [TITUS 1 06 - Elder Qualifications - Family](#); [TITUS 1 07 Elder qualifications - General](#); [TITUS 1 09 Elder Qualifications - Abilities](#)

Book: *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch

Church polity (government & structure) is an area of contention between churches since it can range from extremes of authoritarian hierarchal high church structure (Roman Catholic Church) to democratic low church structure (autonomous church congregational rule) and nearly anything imaginable in-between. The tragedy is that the governmental structure of most churches is built off of traditions developed over time with the added mix of never wanting to deal with previous problems again instead of what is actually written in the Scriptures. This study is designed to help the Bible student become aware of what the Scriptures actually do and do not teach.

Study Questions - Church Polity

1) Read the *Elder, Bishop, Pastor Word Studies* listed above then answer each of the following:

- A) Define and list the responsibilities of a New Testament Elder (πρεσβύτερος / presbyteros word group).
- B) Define and list the responsibilities of a New Testament Bishop (ἐπίσκοπος / episkopos word group).
- C) Define and list the responsibilities of a New Testament Pastor (ποιμήν / poimén word group).
- D) What are the key New Testament differences between each: Elder, Bishop, Pastor?
- E) What is the New Testament relationship between each: Elder, Bishop, Pastor?
- F) What is the relationship in 1 Timothy between the overseer (bishop) in 3:1-2 and the elders (5:17)?
- G) Are there any New Testament scriptures that demonstrate a hierarchal relationship between an Elder, Bishop and Pastor?

2) Read the paper, *Elders - Plurality*, listed above then answer each of the following:

- A) How many Elders were appointed by Paul in each of the churches he established in his missionary journeys?
- B) How many overseers and elders were there in the church in Ephesus (Acts 20; 1 Timothy)?
- C) How many elders did Paul direct Titus to appoint in each city in Crete (Titus 1)?
- D) The book of Acts records Paul going through Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and people were

believing the gospel and becoming disciples of Jesus (Acts 13:48-52, 14:20-22). Did churches exist in those places prior to Paul appointing elders in Acts 14:23?

- E) What is the normal number of elders in a church according to Acts and N.T. epistles?
- F) Is a church with less than two elders a legitimate church? Explain. What the ramifications of the answer to this question on church planting?
- G) What should a church do if it does not have at least two qualified elders (or even one)?

3) Do some historical background research to answer these questions.

- A) What is the origin of the hierarchal relationship between a Bishop, a Pastor and an Elder that exists in some church denominations? What are the pros and cons of such a hierarchal structure?
- B) What is the origin of church structures that claim a church should only have one Elder with other church leaders serving as assistants to him?
- C) What is the origin of churches with a structure of congregational rule?

4) Church leader qualifications

- A) What are the qualifications of an overseer (bishop) in 1 Timothy 3:1-7?
- B) What are the qualifications of elders in Titus 1:5-9?
- C) What are the similarities and differences between these qualifications?
- D) Which of these qualifications are related to character and which are related to having particular spiritual gifts / abilities?
- E) What is the meaning of the qualification in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6 - *husband of one wife* / *μῑὰς γυναικός ἄνδρα* / *mias gunaikos andra* (“one woman man”)? Is divorce an automatic disqualification of a man being an elder or deacon? Why or why not? (See paper on *Divorce & Church Leaders* listed above)
- F) What is the meaning of the qualification in Titus 1:6 - *children who believe* (NASB) / *having faithful children* (NKJV) (*τέχνα ἔχων πιστά* / *tekna echōn Pista*) not accused of dissipation or rebellion? How does the immediate context (the contrast in the sentence) help you to make a proper interpretation? Who do the variations in interpretation reflect on this being a reflection of the character of the elder?

5) Deacons

- A) What are the qualifications for a Deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13?
- B) Which of these qualifications are related to character and which are related to having particular spiritual gifts / abilities?

- C) What are the similarities & differences between the qualifications for an overseer or elder and a deacon?
- D) What are the Biblical responsibilities given to Deacons?
- E) What is the Biblical relationship between overseers / elders and deacons?
- F) Is there a Biblical office of “trustee”? What is the origin of this office in the church? What are a trustee’s qualifications and responsibilities?

6) Deaconesses / Deacon’s Wives

Read the GBC policy on Deaconesses and then answer the following questions.

- A) What are the arguments pro and con for the woman listed in 1 Timothy 3:11 to be:
 - a.) Deacon’s wives?
 - b.) Deaconesses?
 - c.) an unknown office?
- B) What are the qualifications for these women? Why are those important?
- C) What is the relationship of these women to the overseers / elders and deacons?
- D) What are the responsibilities of women in this position?

7) Pragmatic considerations

- A) What are some ways in which a church can ensure that those serving in church leadership positions are Biblical qualified and remain Biblically qualified?
- B) What are some proper ways for a church to deal with a church leader that becomes Biblically unqualified for his office?
- C) What is the danger of allowing an unqualified leader to remain in their office?
- D) What role should the congregation have in finding and / or affirming Biblically qualified leaders?
- E) Can an overseer / elder / pastor require obedience of a member of the congregation simply because he is church leader (Hebrews 13:17)? Explain.

8) Looking for a Church

- A) You have come to recognize that the church you are part of does not have a polity that matches what you now believe fits within Scriptural boundaries. What options do you have in dealing with this situation?
- B) You are looking for a new church home. What issues concerning church polity would be of critical nature to you in joining a new church?
- C) You have moved to a new area and are looking for a new church home. Though you have found some churches that are faithful to the gospel and theologically sound in nearly every area, none of them match the polity structure you believe is best. What criteria would you use to evaluate their church leaders in order to make the best choice from what is available to you?