

# Organization of the Lord’s Church

## Acts 2

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

- A. God is a God of organization and design.
  - 1. It is true in Heaven.
  - 2. It is true in creation.
  - 3. It is true in the Old Testament.
  - 4. It is no less true with regard to the New Testament church.
- B. The denominations of men appear to be more widely known than the Lord’s church since the broad way is more visible to the world than is the narrow way. Therefore denominational forms of organization and government are more widely known than the Biblical form of organization of the Lord’s church.

### **ECCLESIASTICISMS ABOUND IN DENOMINATIONALISM.**

- A. Denominations are ruled by their ecclesiastical forms of government.
  - 1. They have ignored the head of the church and have assumed the right of self-government.
  - 2. They confess with the mouth that Christ has “all authority,” but the heart is far from it and is set on a democratic form of church government.
  - 3. Therefore, we hear much about:
    - a. “Synods”
    - b. “Presbyteries”
    - c. “Councils’
    - d. “General assemblies”
    - e. “Conferences”
    - f. “Boards”
- B. Faithful students of the Bible know that this power to legislate was never given to any group of uninspired men.
  - 1. No group of men has authority from the Bible to decide how many times a year the Lord’s Supper is to be taken . . . But they do.
  - 2. No group of men has authority to change the act, mode, or purpose of baptism as a condition of salvation . . . But they do.
  - 3. No group of men has the authority to make something right that the bible says is wrong . . . Or make something wrong that the Bible says is right.
  - 4. No group of men has the authority add to, delete from, or change the acts of worship through which God has chosen for worshippers to approach Him.
  - 5. No group of men has the authority to change one tenet of the divine order.
- C. A rejection of the supreme authority of Christ is the outgrowth of modifications.
  - 1. Church history shows that one alteration led to another and eventually human heads over religious groups evolved.
  - 2. A change in organization leads to a change in laws. This change in laws does two main things:

- a. It dethrones Christ as King.
- b. Inaugurates a human authority to reign and rule in the place of Christ.
3. Departures from the faith were foretold by Paul in his letter to Timothy.
  - 1 **1 Timothy 4:1-3** – “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,
    - 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,
    - 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
4. The first major departures took place in the areas of church organization and church government.
5. Nonetheless, God’s laws for the organization of the church have not changed.
6. What people have changed in their minds has never been changed in God’s mind.

## THE CHURCH IS A MONARCHY

- A. Christ’s church is a monarchy . . . He is its supreme Head.
  1. **Colossians 1:18** - And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.
  2. **Ephesians 1:22-23** - And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
  3. At the transfiguration, God said in **Matthew 17:5** – “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”
- B. The **one Head** of the **one church** is the **one Christ**.

## THE AUTONOMY OF THE CHURCH

- A. In speaking of the autonomy of the church, we mean the autonomy of the each local congregation.
  1. “Autonomy” is defined as:
    - a. “Right of self-government”
    - b. “A self-governing state”
    - c. “An independent body”
  2. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, each congregation was autonomous . . . And that by the will of the Lord.
    - a. Each congregation was independent of every other congregation.
    - b. There was no tyranny of one church over another.
      1. The church at Jerusalem was not over the church at Ephesus.

2. The church at Rome was not over the church at Antioch.
  3. The church at Corinth was not over the church at Thessalonica.
  - c. Men outside the congregation had no right to exercise authority or power within the congregation.
  - d. The elders in one congregation had no authority to exercise despotic rule or authority over the elders in another congregation.
  - e. Each congregation was free and independent under the teaching of Christ and the apostles:
    1. To govern itself.
    2. To carry on its won work.
    3. To manage its own affairs.
  - f. There is no system of church government larger or smaller than the local congregation.
  - g. All congregations:
    1. Had the same head . . . Christ.
    2. Had the same foundation.
    3. Had the same mission.
    4. Preached the same gospel.
    5. Constituted the one body.
  - h. But each was independent to direct its own work.
  - i. H. Leo Boles, writing in the February 15, 1940 edition of the *Gospel Advocate* said: “If one became corrupted in doctrine or affected by evil practices, other churches would not be so affected. If dissension arose in one, it would not spread to the others; if one perished, the others would not be dragged down. If a window is made of one large pane, a break injures the entire pane; but if it be made up of several panes, it is not so bad to break one. The independence of the churches is a protection for each one.”
  - j. Bro. Boles expressed it well . . . Did he not?
- B. God’s simple organization for the church apparently failed to satisfy many.
1. Hence, they made changes whereby their unchristian aspirations for ecclesiastical lordship could be realized.
  2. May we stand reminded that history records that the first great departure from the truth came in the organization of the church.
- C. Remember . . . God’s work is about People.

## **GOD’S PLAN FOR ORGANIZATION IN THE CHURCH INCLUDED ELDERS.**

- A. God knows man.
1. **John 2:25** – Jesus “...Knew what was in man.”
  2. **Jeremiah 10:23** - O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

3. Throughout the Old Testament, God had observed men departing from Him, returning to Him, only to depart from Him again.
  4. He knows that people need the right kind of guidance.
    - a. While He gave us the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20, He also knew that those who obeyed Him would need good spiritual leadership.
    - b. They would need some special individuals to watch out for them and help them along the way to reach their goal of Heaven.
    - c. In doing so, He did not give us patriarchs . . . Or priests . . . Or judges . . . Or kings . . . Or prophets . . . Or priests. He gave us the eldership.
    - d. Elders are shepherd working with and Under the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, to tend and take care of God’s flock on the earth.
- B. The Bible teaches that elders (also known as bishops, overseers, or pastors) be ordained in every church.
1. **Titus 1:5** – For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.
  2. In **Acts 20:17** we read, “From Miletus he [*Paul*] sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.”
  3. In speaking of this group, Paul declared that they were:
    - a. “Bishops” (American Standard Version)
    - b. “Overseers” (King James Version)
    - c. Men who did this work are also spoken of as “pastors” in Ephesians 4:11.
  4. In each congregation there is to be a plurality of elders/bishops – not a plurality of churches to one bishop.
  5. In ecclesiasticisms men have completely reversed this divine arrangement and have many churches under one bishop.
- C. Duties of elders are set forth in the Bible and are there for the spiritual good of Christians.
1. **Acts 20:28** - Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. The NLT renders it: And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock — his church, purchased with his blood — over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders.
    - a. Three basic charges are given here:
      1. Keep watch
      2. Be shepherds
      3. Be on your guard.
    - b. Those who lead God's people must keep a careful watch over themselves and the flock. This was important. The leadership (elders, pastors, deacons) would be the first line of attack from the enemy (the

- "wolves" mentioned in the next verse). Before the flock could be protected, the shepherds must protect themselves!
- c. The first charge: Keep watch over yourself.
  - d. The second charge: Keep watch over the flock.
  - e. Feed the church with proper spiritual food . . . Teaching . . . Doctrine.
2. **Acts 20:35** – “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. . . .
    - a. Those who are struggling physically.
    - b. Those who are struggling spiritually.
    - c. Those who are struggling emotionally.
    - d. Those who are struggling in ways that are detrimental to their faithfulness to God.
  3. **1 Peter 2:2** - Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.
    - a. Elders were to be like shepherds who lead, guide, and protect the sheep under their care.
    - b. Believers need good leaders as we faced persecution.
  4. **1 Peter 3:2** - Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.
    - a. Go cheerfully to your work of shepherding God’s people.
    - b. Don’t have to be forced by the congregation to do what God has assigned you to do on behalf of the congregation.
    - c. They are to serve as the right kind of examples to the church.
  6. **James 5:14** - Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
    - a. They are to visit the sick.
    - b. When illness comes and our bodies feel vulnerable to growing weak or even dying . . . We need spiritual reassurance.
  7. **Hebrews 13:17** - Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
    - a. Elders have no authority other than that which is given to them in the Bible.
    - b. They are to watch for your souls in that God is going to require an accounting from them about you.
    - c. Elders have a great responsibility. They are not here to please us . . . They are here to please God.
    - d. God will hold them accountable to care for those who are in their charge.
      1. Your faithful life lived here will enable the elders to give a favorable report of you to our Savior.

2. Your lukewarm or unfaithful life lived here will enable the elders to give an unfavorable report of you to our Savior.
3. Brethren, this is a serious matter indeed.

D. Brethren, these duties are serious duties.

1. Elders are here to help us in life to reach Heaven.
2. These duties have been imposed upon them by the Lord.
3. When their duties are performed faithfully, the congregation functions smoothly.
4. When this work is not performed, the congregation suffers.
5. There is not the least intimation in all the Bible that elders have any divine authority to nullify or modify the law of Christ.
6. Elders have only the authority to enforce Christ’s law, and not to make laws to govern those under their oversight.
7. Blessed is the congregation which has elders who perform the aforesaid duties.

### **GOD’S QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERS IN THE CHURCH.**

A. Having seen the best and worse of human characteristics in human beings for over 4,000 years, God knew what He wanted and did not want in the leadership of the church that was purchased with the precious blood of His only Begotten Son. He knew what would be needed to help His people continue in the faith in order to reach Heaven.

B. Qualifications are Heaven-sent are recorded in three places:

1. 1 Timothy 3:1-8
2. Titus 1:6-9
3. 1 Peter 5:1-4

C. Beginning with a desire to serve, these qualifications are given in the Bible.

#### **1. As to God and His Word**

- a. **Not a new convert** (1Tim. 3:6). Not a novice, one newly converted.
- b. **Devout** (Tit. 1:8). Does he demonstrate a definite commitment to know, love, and walk with God?
- c. **Holding fast to the faithful word . . . able to exhort . . . and refute . . .** (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9). Is he a student of the Bible?
  1. Is he stable in the faith, sound in doctrine and practice?
  2. Does he know the Word well enough to teach it to others?
  3. Is he able to use the Word of God to exhort people with sound doctrine and to refute those who are antagonistic to the faith or the truth of Scripture?

#### **2. As to Himself**

- a. **If a man aspires to the office of overseer** (1 Tim. 3:1).
    1. Based on biblical criteria and motives, does he have a strong desire to serve the Lord and the body of Christ as an overseer of the flock, or does he feel constrained by necessity (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2, “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God”)?
    2. The desire must be there.
  - b. **Temperate** (1 Tim. 3:2).
    1. In the everyday situations of life does he tend to react according to biblical principles so that he remains under God’s control?
    2. Is he Spirit-controlled and disciplined rather than self-indulgent?
  - c. **Prudent** (1 Tim. 3:2).
    1. Is he prudent or biblically minded to the extent that he walks wisely according to the wisdom of Scripture?
  - d. **Not quick tempered** (Tit. 1:7).
    1. Does he have a short fuse?
    2. Is he emotionally stable and in control of his feelings?
3. **As to His Family**
- a. **Husband of one wife** (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6).
    1. Is scripturally married.
    2. Not living in adultery.
  - b. **One who manages his own household well** (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Tit. 1:6).
    1. His wife should love, respect, and follow his leadership.
    2. His children should be believers, under control, respectful of authority, and responding positively to God.
    3. If a man take not properly take care of his own family, then how can he take care of the church of our Lord?
4. **As to Others**
- a. **Hospitable** (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8).
    1. Literally, “a lover of strangers.”
    2. As he is able, does he share his home with others in order to minister to their needs?
  - b. **Able to teach** (1 Tim. 3:2).
    1. Able to communicate the Word of God to others.
    2. He must be able to handle those who disagree with him in a patient and gentle manner.
    3. Not all teaching is public . . . Much teaching is private.



- c. **Not self-willed** (Tit. 1:7).
  - 1. A self-willed man is a self-centered man who demands his own way because he cares only for himself.
  - 2. As a servant, an elder must seek to please God and care for others.
  - 3. Is he able to set aside his own preferences in order to promote unity and care for the needs of others?
- d. **Loving what is good** (Tit. 1:8).
  - 1. Literally, “a lover of goodness.”
  - 2. He is a man who is devoted to that which is good or beneficial either in things, deeds, or people.
  - 3. he should take advantage of opportunities to do good to all men (both Christians and non-Christians) in order to build them up rather than tear them down?
- e. **Not pugnacious or a striker, i.e., anger out of control** (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7).
  - 1. He does not have a tendency to be either physically or verbally abusive.
  - 2. He does not use his leadership role to “bully” people around/?
- f. **Uncontentious** (1 Tim. 3:3).
  - 1. He is not a quarrelsome person who struggles against others for self-seeking reasons such as jealousy or selfish ambition.
  - 2. He may strongly disagree, but he will state his case without being contentious.
- g. **Gentle** (1 Tim. 3:3).
  - 1. This word in the original Greek text refers to strength under control, like a powerful, but gentle horse.
  - 2. he should handle others in a gentle, patient, and gracious way.
- h. **Just** (Tit. 1:8).
  - 1. In his relationships with others, he should be able to make just decisions, those that are wise, fair, impartial, objective, and honest according to the principles of Scripture?
- i. **Respectable**
  - 1. Orderly, balanced (1 Tim. 3:2). Is he respected by others because his life adorns the Word of God? The basic idea of this word is orderly. It describes a man whose behavior is good and blended harmoniously in a balanced manner.
- j. **Having a good reputation with those on the outside** (1 Tim. 1:7).
  - 1. He should have a good reputation among unbelievers.



## 5. As to Things

- a. **Free from the love of money** (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7).
  1. He must have his priorities straight.
  2. His life is not devoted to material wealth.
  3. He does not carry on dishonest business practices.
- b. **Not addicted to wine** (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7)
  1. He is to free from any form of substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, etc.) or any kind of addiction which might take control of his life, cause belligerent and irresponsible behavior, and cause weaker Christians to stumble (Rom. 14:13-21)

**CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARD ITS ELDERS.** It is just as essential that the congregation measure up to its duties toward the elders as it is for the elders to perform their duties toward the congregation.

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** - And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you , and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.
2. **Hebrews 13:17** – Obey those who rule over you , and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
3. **1 Timothy 5:19** - Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

## DEACONS:

A.

## Qualifications for Deacons

In General

Tested . . . beyond reproach (1 Tim. 3:10). Before a man is asked to serve as a deacon, he is to be observed over a period of time to see if he is qualified for that ministry. If he is found to be beyond reproach (if there are no violations in the qualities needed to serve), he may then be chosen to serve as a deacon. This is a warning against hastily choosing men for ministry for whatever reason (the pressure of needs, to fill a quota, etc.). Time is needed so his qualifications can become clearly apparent.

This principle also applies to the selection of elders (see 1 Tim. 5:22). Because of context, some think 1 Timothy 5:22 deals with church discipline, but the only record we have of the laying on of hands in the New Testament and in early church history (before the third century) is associated with the selection and ordination of men for ministry (cf. Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Because of this, it is better to take this passage as a warning against hasty selection and ordination of elders.

### As to God and His Word

Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:8). “The mystery of the faith” refers to the body of Christian doctrine to which we hold (believe and live by) through faith. “With a clear conscience” means he seeks to honestly live by the truths of Scripture. He keeps short accounts with God.

### As to Self

(1) Men of dignity (1 Tim. 3:8). He is one who takes his life and work seriously as a part of his devotion to the Lord. He has a vision for his life’s purpose.

(2) Not double tongued (1 Tim. 3:8). He is not a hypocrite who says one thing to one person and something contradictory to another. He speaks the truth, is honest. He does not destroy his credibility by words that are contradictory.

### As to Things

(1) Not addicted to much wine (1 Tim. 3:8). (See above under elder qualifications.)

(2) Not fond of sordid gain (1 Tim. 3:8). As with an elder, he must not use the office for personal gain, or be controlled by the desire for material wealth. Wrong motives kill a man’s ability to serve the Lord and love others. He cannot serve God and mammon or self-seeking goals.

### As to Family

(1) A husband of one wife (Literally, a one-woman man) (1 Tim. 3:12). See Addendum. (See above under elder qualifications.)

(2) Good managers of their children and their own households (1 Tim. 3:12). (See above under elder qualifications.)

There is one word which truly summarizes these qualifications. It’s the word SERVANT. A deacon, as with an elder, is to be a servant of God and a servant of men (Mark 10:43-45).

**CONCLUSION:**

A.