

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

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The second chapter of the book of Acts records the establishment of the Lord's church. On the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, the 12 apostles were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), who "gave them utterance" about the resurrected Christ. Peter preached, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:32-36). Acts 2:37-42 records the response of the people, and the conversion of about 3,000 souls. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.* And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Verse 47 informs us that the Lord added the saved ones "to the church." How was this church that God Himself set up to be organized and governed?

When there are no elders

The church of Christ in Jerusalem continued to grow in number, gaining over 5,000 more converts in Acts chapters 3 and 4. After this, Acts 5:14 says, "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." And Acts 6:1 says that "the number of the disciples was multiplied." The church in its infancy did not yet have men appointed to the office of an elder. Before there were elders appointed in Jerusalem, all of the men together had the authority. In Acts 6:2-3, the twelve apostles "called *the multitude of the disciples* unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, *brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*" The "brethren" (i.e. the men of the church) then chose seven men to conduct the business of the daily ministrations (Acts 6:5-6). We see the same organization in the church at Corinth. Paul addressed the "brethren" (1 Cor 1:10-11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6,14) and told them to "gather together" and exercise the authority in the church (1 Cor 5:4-5). Later in time, the church at Jerusalem had qualified men who were appointed elders in the church (Acts 11:30; 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4). From these scriptures, we learn that if there is not a plurality of men qualified to be appointed elders, then God's will is for all the male members of the church, the brethren, to make up the authority in the congregation.

The office of an elder

God's ultimate will is for every church to have qualified elders. Acts 14:23 says Paul

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(continued)

and Barnabas “*ordained them elders in every church.*” Paul had left Titus in Crete to “*set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city*” (Titus 1:5-6). It is notable that the Lord says that the church is *lacking* something when it does not have elders. But never in God’s word do we read about one individual ruling over a congregation. Thus, the popular denominational system of having one “pastor” over the church is not found in scripture and is therefore unauthorized. To put it plainly, that form of organization is wrong. Elders (plural) were ordained in every church. In every case, a single church or congregation has a plurality of elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2,4,6,22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; Php 1:1; Titus 1:5; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1). Therefore, there must be at least two qualified men for a church to have a scriptural eldership. It is also necessary that each of the elders individually meet every qualification. It is not sufficient for the eldership *collectively* to meet each qualification. Notice that Titus was appointed to ordain elders in every city “*if any be*” (Titus 1:6), and the specific qualifications for the office are then listed. Titus 1:7 again emphasizes that “*a bishop must be*” all of the things which are described in the passage. “Any” and “a” are singular terms, applying all the qualifications to *each individual*. And “if” is a conditional word, and “must be” also eliminates any possibility that it would be acceptable in God’s sight to appoint an individual to the office of an elder who does not meet all of the qualifications of that office. If there are at least two men who do meet all the qualifications, and if they desire the office (1 Tim 3:10), then they must be appointed as the overseers of the congregation. At that point, it would be wrong for the congregation *not* to appoint elders. God has also ordained for there to be men who meet the given qualifications to be appointed as deacons, servants of the church to work under the oversight and authority of the elders (1 Tim 3:11-14). The elders are the authority and the deacons are servants. This is God’s ultimate will. There are many people who believe that it is not really important how the church is organized, and that differences among religious organizations on this issue are not very serious and should be ignored. This viewpoint, though common, is *false* according to the teachings of God’s word. For example, in the Old Testament, Jeroboam was killed for attempting to alter God’s organization of the Jewish religion (1 Kings 12:31; 13:33-34). Though the covenant has changed since then, God has not, nor has His view of altering the Divine organization (Mal 3:6). Any other form of organization for the church than qualified elders and deacons, or in the absence of qualified elders, the men of the church collectively holding the authority, cannot be found in God’s word and is therefore unauthorized and sinful.

2013 ATTENDANCE FIGURES

Sunday mornings:	2803 total, 53.9 average
Sunday evenings:	2532 total, 48.7 average
Wednesday evenings:	2181 total, 42.8 average