

Six Apostolic Elements of Church Government
from Thomas Witherow's *The Apostolic Church: Which Is It?*
(online at http://www.americanpresbyterianchurch.org/the_apostolic_church.htm)

Presbyterian Government

- Has roots in the synagogue system that spans both testaments
- Emphasizes order and accountability
 - “Let all things be done decently and in order.” (1Cor 14:40)
 - “...they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.” (Heb 13:17)

1. Officers are chosen by the people

Acts 6:3,5

Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” *** ⁵ And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and ***; ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Acts 14:23?

²³ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

(Greek *xeirotoneantes* for “appointed” = “showing of hands;” “elect by raising of hands;” early church documents show this was the understanding of congregations’ choosing leaders and delegates, although we translate the Greek word as “appoint” since the apostles are the subject of the verb. Instead of translating “appoint,” it could mean the apostles “nominated” with a confirmation by showing of hands.

2. Bishop = Elder

Phil. 1:1

¹ Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Tit. 1:5,7

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—*** ⁷For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, ***

Acts 20:17,28

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said***

²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (i.e., “bishops”), to shepherd the church of God^o which He purchased with His own blood.

3. Plurality of elders, not just one solo elder

Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7

I Pet. 5:1

¹ The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ,

4. Ordination is by a plurality of elders

Acts 6:6

⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Acts 13:1-3+

¹ Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit...

I Tim. 4:14

¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

An exception for ordination at the hands of an apostle must be recognized:
2Tim 1:6, Tit 1:5, 1Tim 5:22

5. Church government is in the hands of the **corporate representatives to whom appeals can be made.**

I Thess. 5:12

¹² And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you

Heb. 13:17

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.

I Pet. 5:1-3

¹ The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ...: ² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock

Right of appeal

Acts 15:2,4,22 (note variant in 15:23)

² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. ⁴ And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders;

²² Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch (NKJV)

Acts 16:4.

⁴ And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

6. Christ is the only Head of the Church

I Pet. 5:4

⁴ ...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.