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**“Come, Let Us Reason Together” About the Bible”**  
**What Is the Church of the New Testament?**  
**Bible Study Series**

*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)*

**LESSON FIVE, Part 2 - How Is the Church Organized?**  
**What is the Organizational Structure of the Church Established by Jesus?**

*Estimated Reading Time: 12-13 minutes*

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**Roles and Leadership Within the Local Church**

God’s pattern includes specific roles in each local congregation: elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers. Please consider the following titles as they appear in scripture:

**1. Elders (Also Called Bishops, Pastors, Overseers, Shepherds, Presbyters)**

These are the spiritual shepherds (leaders) of the church. Several terms are used interchangeably in Scripture to describe the same role:

***“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church... 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.” (Acts 20:17, 28)***

- **Elders** (verse 17) – men of maturity and experience.
- **Overseers/Bishops** (verse 28) – those who manage and lead.
- **Shepherds/Pastors** (verse 28) – those who feed and protect the flock.

These are not three different offices — they are different descriptions of the same work.

***“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” (1 Timothy 5:17)***

***“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—” (Titus 1:5)***

Elders had to meet specific qualifications, found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. These included being the husband of one wife, having faithful children, being able to teach, and having a good reputation.

**Also note:** there was always a *plurality* of elders — never just one “pastor” leading a church alone.

**2. Deacons – Servants of the Church**

Deacons serve under the direction of the elders to care for physical and practical needs of the congregation.

***“Likewise, deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money...” (1 Timothy 3:8)***

Their qualifications are also given in 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

Deacons are not rulers or decision-makers, but they are vital in serving the body of Christ — just as those seven men in Acts 6 helped the early church serve its widows and needs.

### **3. Preachers / Evangelists**

Preachers proclaim the Word of God. They teach, encourage, correct, and equip. But preachers are not pastors or rulers over the congregation.

***“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:5)***

Preachers like Timothy and Titus worked with congregations but were subject to the leadership of the elders.

### **4. Teachers**

Teachers are those who instruct others in God’s Word, helping them grow in faith and understanding. Teaching is a vital work in the church, and it continues in every generation.

***“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...” (Ephesians 4:11)***

This verse describes roles that were given for the equipping of the saints and the edifying of the body of Christ. Some of these roles — like evangelists, pastors (elders), and teachers — continue today. But others, like apostles and prophets, were unique to the first-century church and the establishment of God’s revealed will.

### **Apostles – A Special Group Appointed by Jesus**

There were only twelve apostles personally chosen by Jesus during His earthly ministry. These included Peter, James, John, and the rest of the original twelve (Matthew 10:2–4). After Judas fell from his position, he was replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:26). Later, Paul was specially called by the risen Christ to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Romans 1:1).

No one today can meet the qualifications required to be an apostle, which necessarily included being a witness of the resurrected Christ:

***“...of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us... one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1:21–22)***

Once these inspired men completed their mission — delivering and confirming the gospel — the office of apostle ceased.

***“...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...” (Ephesians 2:20)***

They laid the foundation of the church, and once the foundation is laid, it does not need to be laid again.

### **Prophets – No Longer Needed After God’s Revelation Was Completed**

In the Old Testament and in the early church, prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s will before the New Testament was fully written. But once God’s revelation was completed through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and once the apostles and prophets had fully delivered that message, the need for new prophecy ended.

***“...when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”***  
*(1 Corinthians 13:10)*

The “perfect” refers to the complete revelation of God’s Word. After that, the miraculous gifts — including prophecy — passed away. The role of the prophet was temporary, tied to the time before the full gospel was available in written form.

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### **Teachers Today – Instructing from God’s Completed Word**

Today, teachers in the church are not apostles or prophets. They are faithful men and women who teach God’s already revealed Word — not new revelations. Whether in a public class, one-on-one study, or encouraging younger Christians, teachers play a vital role in passing on the faith and helping others understand Scripture.

Paul instructed Timothy to continue this chain of teaching:

***“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)***

This remains true today. While apostles or prophets aren’t needed now to reveal God’s messages to man, we have the Scriptures, and faithful teachers are still needed to help the church understand and obey God’s will.

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### **Unscriptural Titles and Offices**

Many churches today use religious titles like:

- Reverend, Father
  - Bishop, Archbishop
  - Cardinal, Pope
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But these are not found in the New Testament church. In fact, some of these titles go directly against what Jesus taught.

**“Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”**

*(Matthew 23:9)*

Calling a man “Father” in a spiritual sense is directly prohibited.

**“Holy and reverend is His name.”** *(Psalm 111:9, KJV)*

*(“Holy and awesome is His name” in NKJV)*

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**The term “Reverend” belongs to God — not to men.**

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### **A Brief History: How These Titles Emerged**

After the apostles died, church leadership began to change. Some elders began to elevate themselves, claiming more authority than others. Eventually, a single elder became the bishop over many churches. That is not God's pattern.

In time, the hierarchy grew:

- Bishops became archbishops,
- Archbishops became cardinals,
- And cardinals eventually selected a Pope — a human head over the church.

The continuous drifting away from Scripture resulted in man-made religious systems, not the New Testament church.

The churches of Christ reject these unscriptural titles and return to the simplicity of God's pattern.

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### **Conclusion: Let's Follow God's Pattern**

God has always given His people a pattern to follow:

- He gave Noah a pattern for the ark.
  - He gave Moses a pattern for the tabernacle.
  - He gave David and Solomon a pattern for the temple.
- He gave mankind — through His apostles and His Word — a pattern for the church.

God's blueprint is to be followed exactly and faithfully.

**“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons...”**

*(Philippians 1:1)*

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**“Come, Let Us Reason Together”** About the Bible **LESSON FIVE, Part 2 – How is the Church Organized?**

What Is the Church of the New Testament?

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That's the simple pattern:

- Saints (members),
- Bishops (elders),
- Deacons — all under the headship of Christ.

The Lord's design for the church is not only perfect — it's timeless. Let's respect it, honor it, and follow it.

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## **■ Lesson Five, Part 2 – Questions to Confirm Understanding**

### **“How Is the Church Organized?” – Part 2**

*Estimated Time to answer the questions: 3 – 5 minutes; with scripture look-up: 22 - 15 minutes*

Read and answer the following set of questions about this lesson, and circle your answer: “True | False” or “Yes | No”. Look up the scriptures provided to confirm your answers. Then compare your answers with the Answer Key provided after these questions.

1. Elders, bishops, pastors, overseers, and shepherds are all different roles in the local church.  
**True | False**
2. (Acts 20:28) The Holy Spirit made elders into shepherds to feed the church of God.  
**Yes | No**
3. There is always a plurality of elders in a New Testament congregation.  
**True | False**
4. (Titus 1:5) “Appoint elders in every city as I commanded you”—shows elders were only optional.  
**True | False**
5. Deacons are spiritual overseers and decision-makers in the congregation.  
**True | False**
6. (1 Timothy 3:8) Deacons are to be reverent and not greedy for money.  
**Yes | No**
7. Preachers are authorized to serve as the ruling pastors of the church.  
**True | False**
8. (2 Timothy 4:5) Timothy was told to do the work of an evangelist and fulfill his ministry.  
**Yes | No**
9. Teachers in the New Testament only include apostles and prophets.  
**True | False**

10. (Ephesians 4:11) God gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.  
**Yes | No**
11. Apostles were chosen by Jesus and had to be witnesses of His resurrection.  
**True | False**
12. (Acts 1:21–22) A requirement to be an apostle was to be a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.  
**Yes | No**
13. Prophets are still necessary today because God’s Word is incomplete.  
**True | False**
14. (1 Corinthians 13:10) “When that which is perfect has come...” refers to the complete revelation of God’s Word.  
**Yes | No**
15. Titles like “Reverend,” “Father,” and “Pope” are not found in the New Testament church.  
**True | False**
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 **Lesson Five, Part 2 – Answer Key**

*Estimated Time to Read the Answers: 5 – 7 minutes; With Reflection and Contemplation: 22 – 25 minutes*

**1. Elders, bishops, pastors, overseers, and shepherds are all different roles in the local church.**

**Correct Answer: False**

**Explanation:** These terms describe the same office. Acts 20:17, 28 uses multiple terms for the same group of men.

**2. (Acts 20:28) The Holy Spirit made elders into shepherds to feed the church of God.**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“...the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28)*

**Explanation:** Elders are called to shepherd (pastor) the church. The verse directly connects elders, overseers, and shepherds.

**3. There is always a plurality of elders in a New Testament congregation.**

**Correct Answer: True**

**Explanation:** Elders are always mentioned in the plural (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5). No church had just one elder or “pastor” leading alone.

**4. (Titus 1:5) “Appoint elders in every city as I commanded you”—shows elders were only optional.**

**Correct Answer: False**

*“...appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—” (Titus 1:5, NKJV)*

**Explanation:** This was a command, not a suggestion. Elders were essential for the order of the church.

**5. Deacons are spiritual overseers and decision-makers in the congregation.**

**Correct Answer: False**

**Explanation:** Deacons serve under the elders. They are not rulers, but helpers in practical matters (Acts 6; 1 Timothy 3).

**6. (1 Timothy 3:8) Deacons are to be reverent and not greedy for money.**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money.” (1 Timothy 3:8)*

**Explanation:** This verse outlines the character expected of deacons. They must be upright in behavior and conduct.

**7. Preachers are authorized to serve as the ruling pastors of the church.**

**Correct Answer: False**

**Explanation:** Preachers (evangelists) proclaim the Word but are not overseers or elders. Elders oversee; preachers serve under their leadership.

**8. (2 Timothy 4:5) Timothy was told to do the work of an evangelist and fulfill his ministry.**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“...do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:5, NKJV)*

**Explanation:** Paul directed Timothy to preach and teach, showing the distinct role of evangelists in the church.

**9. Teachers in the New Testament only include apostles and prophets.**

**Correct Answer: False**

**Explanation:** While apostles and prophets were teachers, so are evangelists and faithful Christians who pass on God’s Word (2 Timothy 2:2).

**10. God gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. (Ephesians 4:11)**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” (Ephesians 4:11)*

**Explanation:** This verse lists different roles, some of which (apostles and prophets) have ceased, while others (evangelists, teachers, pastors) continue.

**11. Apostles were chosen by Jesus and had to be witnesses of His resurrection.**

**Correct Answer: True**

**Explanation:** All apostles were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (Acts 1:21–22). Paul was chosen later by the risen Jesus directly (Acts 9).

**12. (Acts 1:21–22) A requirement to be an apostle was to be a witness of Jesus’ resurrection.**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“...one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1:22)*

**Explanation:** This verse lays out the requirement for apostleship. That role cannot be filled today.

**13. Prophets are still necessary today because God’s Word is incomplete.**

**Correct Answer: False**

*“I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3)*

**Explanation:** God’s Word (the faith) has been fully revealed. Prophets were temporary until that revelation was complete.

**14. (1 Corinthians 13:10) “When that which is perfect has come...” refers to the complete revelation of God’s Word.**

**Correct Answer: Yes**

*“...when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.” (1 Corinthians 13:10)*

**Explanation:** “That which is perfect” refers to the full written revelation of God. After it came, miraculous gifts passed away.

**15. Titles like “Reverend,” “Father,” and “Pope” are not found in the New Testament church.**

**Correct Answer: True**

**Explanation:** These are man-made religious titles. Jesus forbade using “Father” as a spiritual title (Matthew 23:9), and “Reverend” is a name reserved for God (Psalm 111:9, KJV).

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