

## 3 Features of Church Government NOT Found in the Bible

When it comes to ministry, the process of decision making is so important because bureaucracy can become incredibly inhibiting. To make matters worse, a church's structure is often wedded to some of the most deeply rooted customs within the life of a church.

Yet a church's structure is crucial when it comes to rethinking the church because it is a church's structure that supports and facilitates the purposes and mission of a church. Think of it functioning the way a skeleton serves a human body — it holds together and supports the working parts of the body in order to enable them to function as a body.

A church's structure can either serve the church or bring it to a standstill. It can energize a community of faith or lead it toward ever deepening levels of discouragement. It can enable men and women to use their gifts and abilities for the kingdom of God or tie the hands and frustrate the most dedicated efforts of God's people.

Why?

Because the structure of any organization directly affects morale, effectiveness and unity. Morale, effectiveness and unity are key issues for the life of any church. Consequently, church structure must be evaluated in light of whether it promotes them.

There are a wide number of approaches to church government, from elder rule to a more congregationally based approach. **Yet most forms of church government have three features that dominate their structure: committees, policies and majority rule.**

None of them serve morale; none of them serve effectiveness; none of them serve unity.

And none can be found in the Bible.

The most successful churches subscribe to a singular philosophy. Namely, that the ministry is not called to fit the church's structure; the structure exists to further effective ministry. And there are some real concerns regarding committees, problems with policies, and misgivings about majority rule.

My **biggest concern with committees** isn't that it takes people away from the frontlines of ministry and moves them into issues related to maintenance, such as budgets and organizational matters (it does). My biggest concern is that oversight committees keep the people who are *doing* the ministry from making the decisions *about* the ministry. Authority and responsibility become distant from one another. This is a recipe for poor decision making, not to mention low morale. This is not to say that oversight — particularly in regard to vision, values, performance and mission — are not appropriate. Yet the fact remains that the individuals who are the most intimately involved in a particular ministry are the best qualified to make the day in, day out decisions regarding that ministry.

My **biggest problem with policies** is the removal of judgment. A few years ago the federal government bought hammers with a specification manual that was thirty-three pages long. Where is the trust in the person who is buying the hammers? This does not mean certain policies are not required to serve as guidelines, and even as protection. Yet unhindered, policies can multiply to the point of organizational asphyxiation. It takes trust for this structure to operate but, as Plato argued, good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will always find a way around law.

My **biggest misgiving about majority rule** is that the Bible teaches that a church is a family (see Galatians 6:10; Hebrews 2:10-12; 1 Peter 4:17). In most family structures, there are the mature (parents) and the immature (children). As a family, the church contains members who are at different levels of spiritual maturity. If every decision is made by the majority instead of the most spiritually mature, then there is a very strong chance that the majority could mislead a church.

This is precisely what happened with the Israelites. Moses sent twelve spies into the Promised Land to report back to the people if it was everything God had promised. All twelve agreed that the land was flowing with milk and honey, but the majority said that the land could not be taken. Only two, Caleb and Joshua, were convinced that God wanted them to possess the land. The majority were allowed to rule, however, which left the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for another forty years.

I don't know what your church structure is like. If you were to ask me, I would encourage the **separation of maintenance from ministry**, and the **development of self-directed work teams**.

Let me give you a quick insight into both. In most churches, the relationship between maintenance and ministry is simple: the pastors are the ministers, and the people are the administrators. Yet this is diametrically opposed to the teaching of the Bible in relation to the pastor's role as equipper and leader, and creates a bottleneck for ministry. Rethinking structure involves an entirely new paradigm: the people are the ministers, and the pastors are the administrators.

As for self-directed work teams, the idea is simple: for a team to function at its optimal level of ability, the members must be self-directed, which means they must own the process or task at hand. Only when given the responsibility *and* the authority to follow through on a task can a team have the ability to become flexible and responsive to changing events and demands.

Michael Hammer likens it to how a football team operates. The offense and defense bring together a collection of tasks—blocking, tackling, passing, and receiving—that together achieve a result. The offense and defense operate within the confines of a carefully worked out game plan and strategy, but once a play begins, the players are largely self-directed. They have to be self-directed because the nature of the game demands it. When the ball is handed to a runner, it is up to him to determine whether to cut left, right, or go up the middle. While the offensive coordinator may have designed the play, selected the players, assigned them their roles, and even trained them, it is the players who are the implementers and who must have the freedom

to make split-second decisions in light of the constantly changing realities of their situation. This is why we celebrate quarterbacks like Peyton Manning and Cam Newton; they are able to read the defense, call an audible, and make the best play.

But that's the point of any good structure. **Let your players be able to *play*.**

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