

Reformed Church Government

Foundation principles

Teacher's Manual

by

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... the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.¹ 1Timothy 3:15 (ESV)

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To the teacher

The student's manual is identical to this one except that answers to questions and suggestions to the teacher have been removed. Underlined texts mean that in the student's manual, these are a blank line for the student to fill in. The texts in block are either long answers to the questions or suggestions to the teacher as to further comments. The teacher is at liberty to ignore the latter or use his own.

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Introduction to reformed ecclesiology

This book is based on the premise that the reformed style of church government is the only one mandated by God in his Word. The study of church government is called in theology, *ecclesiology*

Biblical government is representative but not democratic; authoritative but not authoritarian. In this lies its genius: It allows the people a voice in who leads them, without the chaos of majority rule. It gives authority for leaders to make decisions while avoiding the despotic rule of a single fallible man.

Our God-given human instinct desires freedom but with security. Freedom without form is anarchy. Form without freedom is bondage. The genius of biblical government resides in providing Christians with a balance of both.

We will see how reformed government is rooted in the entire history of the people of God, starting from the earliest times in the Old Testament and consistent in its fundamental principles in the New Testament.

Though these principles came *through* a culture, the Hebrews, they are not the *product* of a culture. Like all other teachings in God's word, they are products of revelation and therefore primarily ethical in their essence, not merely administrative. We are not free therefore to discard them on the grounds of cultural issues. We make cultures conform to the word of God, not vice versa.

We will see...

- There exists only one form of church government endorsed by God in the Bible.
- The principles involved are moral and not merely administrative and therefore mandatory, regardless of culture.
- Biblical government reflects the eternal tension between law and grace as in other aspects of Christian living.
- The New Testament principles are a simplification of Old Testament practices and therefore church government is based on the whole Bible.

This study is intended for seminary students or those in preparation for church leadership. It assumes the student is a member of an evangelical church and familiar with foundational concepts of church life. These include such ideas as Christ the only head of the church, which is his body, and the difference between the visible local church and invisible universal church. This is therefore an intermediate-level study on biblical government.²

Inferential logic

In the study of ecclesiology, an inferential approach is necessary. Certain biblical themes, such as the Trinity for example, lack a discourse in Scripture dedicated exclusively to that particular theme. We must deduce the truth by clues scattered through the Bible.

So it is with ecclesiology. The Bible teaches a form of church government we must deduce from clues and concepts scattered throughout both Testaments.

Here the teacher may explain the difference between a deductive versus an inductive approach to logic by comparing a detective to a prosecuting attorney. The detective gathers facts to arrive at a conclusion about a suspect. The prosecuting attorney, on the other hand, announces to the court that the suspect is guilty and that he is going to present evidence to prove it. The detective is basing his logic on inferences. This is a inductive logic. The attorney is deductive in his approach because he starts his reasoning with the presupposition that he intends to prove.

The writers of the Westminster Confession understood this about church government by declaring ...

The whole counsel of God ... is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: CFW Cap.1, Art.6

They also acknowledged the need for flexibility and tolerance in church government because of the variety of cultures, within limits established in the word of God.

... and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. ¹⁴

Lesson One: What is ecclesiology?

Ecclesiology is the study of church government, based on the Greek work *ekklesia*, which means “assembly.” The apostles applied this word to the Christian church. This word is used 67 times in the New Testament in a variety of ways. In the LXX, it is used about 100 times to translate the Hebrew *qahal*, which means *congregation* and sometimes refers to the people of Israel in general.

The term can refer to either a local congregation of believers or to believers in a region.³ Because of the ambiguities, it is better to build our ecclesiology on the totality of Scripture than on a specific usage of the word.

When did the church begin?

Radical differences exist among evangelicals as to when the church began. Reformed theology claims it began with the covenant of grace God established with Israel and fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, there exists one people of God in both Testaments, saved by grace but under different administrations of the covenant. This view of the church is known as *covenant theology*.

Others, such as Baptists and Pentecostals, believe the church started at Pentecost because the Old Testament in its fullness was a dispensation that disappeared. As a logical consequence of this theology, they assert that there exists two people of God; those saved under the law and those saved under grace. In their way of thinking, Pentecost inaugurated a a covenant that did not exist previously. This view of the church is call *dispensational theology*.

This brief study will not allow us to explore these theologies in depth. Nevertheless, it is essential that the student understands that the differences among evangelicals in their view of ecclesiology has their roots in these two views of the Bible as a whole.

Evidence for reformed covenantal theology

In Acts 7:38, Israel in the time of the Exodus is called the *congregation in the wilderness*. This is the same Greek *ekklesia*, used by the apostles to describe the church in the New Testament.

In Hebrews 11:39-40, we see the saints of both Testaments unified and viewed as one inseparable people.

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The covenant of grace is inaugurated with Abraham in Genesis 17 and fulfilled in Christ in Galatians 3.

Explain that a comparison of Genesis 17 with Galatian 3 shows that the covenant made with Abraham is the Christian covenant. This covenant transcends both Testaments in which believers are saved by the same means, faith alone. It is difficult to maintain a dispensationalist ecclesiology if the covenant of grace transcends both dispensations and views all believers as part of one sole people. See Romans 4 and Paul's arguments affirming that Abraham was saved in the same way as we.

What is the mission of the church? — Matthew 28:19

The Great Commission is the mission, the church is the method. Mt.28:19-20. This means making disciples for Christ, plus nothing. Tragically many movements, especially liberals, have tried to add to the church's mission, thus distracting from the gospel.⁴

A Presbyterian missionary theologian expresses it like this:

Making the world around us a better place is a good thing, and is ordinarily to be expected when people are coming to Christ. But that is not the mission of the church. The mission given to us in Matthew 28:18-20 is very specific: to make disciples of all nations through baptizing and teaching. If it is not baptizing and teaching, it might be lawful, it might even be commanded, but it is not obedience to the Great Commission.⁵

Feeding the poor is not the mission of the church. Social justice is not the mission of the church. Though these may be necessary at times, leaders must never allow them to detract from the mission of making disciples.

A church that preaches the gospel faithfully is the greatest social success the world has ever seen or every will see. No institution has the wisdom or power to change sinners to saints because this is the power of God working through the gospel. The church cannot allow itself to be deviated from this mission for anything else, however good it may be, unless it is a means to open a door for the gospel to be heard.

According to the Great Commission in Mt.28:19-29, what is the one mission of the church? Making disciples for Christ. Anything in addition to this is not the mission of the church.

According to the Great Commission, what is the method for doing the mission? Preaching and teaching

According to Ephesians 4:11-12 how is the church to implement its mission? By training its members in ministry.

Visible versus invisible church

Protestant theology views the church in two ways: Visible and invisible.

The visible church refers to the local congregation which meets for worship. It is visible to the human eye.

The invisible church refers to all those saved throughout history. (See 1 Corinthians 1:2)

Explain that the local church may be a combination of both. It can have members that are not saved; members of a visible church

What is the kingdom of God?

The Roman Catholicism makes no distinction between the visible and invisible church because it considers membership in its church as a condition of salvation. So likewise, it considers itself the kingdom of God of on earth.

The apostolic rule of love

According to the following verses, what was the attitude of the apostles as regards discerning between members of the local church who are saved versus those who are not? Does the New Testament recognize there may exist such a condition in the church? (Matthew 13:24-30; Galatians 4:20; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 John 2:19)

Give an example to the students of how some pastors probe into each member with questions about their *experience* with the Lord in an effort to determine if they are truly born again. Although this pastoral concern is laudable, it is not biblical. The apostolic rule of love means that we accept a person's verbal profession of faith in Jesus Christ as a reflection of their spiritual condition, until their conduct proves the contrary. This then becomes a question of church discipline.

What is a biblical church?

How do we distinguish between a genuine biblical church and those that are apostate?

A church may err widely in minor doctrines or elements of worship and still be considered a valid church. However, if it lacks certain elements, then it is apostate and may not be viewed as Christian. That is the view taken in the 16th century by the reformers.

According to reformed tradition, three characteristics distinguish a true church:

The faithful preaching of the word of God

This includes preaching the biblical gospel as opposed to false gospels disguised as genuine. This requires a certain amount of discernment.

According to Galatians 1:6-9, false gospels were preached in some churches even in the days of Paul. What was Paul's attitude toward those involved in such? Cursed of God

Discussion in class: Sometimes a church may not be preaching a false gospel as such but moral principles or psychological issues may be its focus. May we consider such to be proclamation of the word of God?

There exists moral discourses in the Bible. If the teaching is limited to this, without Christ and Christ crucified, then such a church is out of line.

What today may be some false gospels that are being preached that try to pass as Christian? Social gospel; prosperity gospel

What does Galatians 1:8-10 say about the preaching of a biblical gospel? Any church that does not preach justification by faith alone in Christ alone is apostate, is cursed of God and must not be considered Christian.

According to 2 Timothy 4:1-5, what was recommended to Timothy to do? Preach the word, although hearers may not like it.

The faithful administration of the sacraments/ordinances

Jesus instituted two sacraments/ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. According to Matthew 26:26-28 and Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, is the Lord's Supper optional or mandatory in the practice of the church? Mandatory

According to Matthew 28:19,20, is baptism optional or mandatory. Mandatory

Church discipline

A key text on discipline 1 Corinthians 5. It features important points.

The purpose of discipline

- The honor of God
- The purity of the church
- The restoration of the sinner

Discussion on 1 Corinthians 5

When is tolerance a virtue and when is it sin, according to verses 1-2? Tolerance is a sin when believers tolerate unrepentant scandalous sin in the church. It is a virtue when dealing with repentant believers struggling with personal sin issues.

What are the sins in this chapter that define a person as non-Christian? Fornication; greed; thievery; idolatry; drunkenness

What must a church do that has these practices going on in the church, according to verses 6-8? Excommunication of unrepentant believers persisting in scandalous sins.

According to Revelation 2:18-24, what is a church risking if it neglects discipline? Judgment from God on the church.

Who in the church is responsible for disciplinary procedures? Acts 20:28-30; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:19-21 The ordained elders, not the congregation as a whole.

Explain here that in congregational government, the congregation disciplines by vote. This is problematic because often delinquent believers get off scot free because of the ignorance or unbiblical sympathy of other members.

The three censures

A *censure* is an act of discipline taken by the church leaders for the purpose of restoring the sinner believer. These are in their correct order.

- Admonition: Rebuke and counseling
- Suspension: Removing the right to take communion, hold office or vote in congregational meetings.
- Excommunication: Removal of membership and not allowed attendance at the church.

Which of the three censures is found in 2 Timothy 4:2? Admonition; counseling

Which of the three censures is found in 1 Corinthians 5:13? Excommunication

Which of the three censures is found in 1 Corinthians 5:11? Suspension of fellowship which by the nature of that includes suspension from the Lord's supper.

Discussion: Procedure against an elder: 1 Timothy 5:19-20

According to these verses, upon whom is the burden of proof? The burden of proof is always on the accusers, never upon the elder.

What must the accused elder prove? Nothing whatsoever. He is innocent until proven guilty.

If an accused elder is not found guilty, what is the procedure regarding the accusers? The persons who brought the accusation should be rebuked publically for the sin of slander and called to repentance.

Discussion: A serious case. Acts 20:28-30; Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10

According to these verses, what is a type of very serious disciplinary issue that may occur in a church and how is to be handled? Divisive and heretical people must be dealt with firmly and immediately.

The teacher may explain here that this is rarely done, which explains the source of a lot of church splits.

Discussion: When does Mathew 18:15-18 apply?

This text refers to a dispute between two people in the church and does not refer to all disciplinary situations. This point is important because sometimes people can get

critical if leaders do not conform to this pattern in the case of scandalous sin in the church. The teacher may point out that in the case of incest in 1 Corinthians 5, such a procedure was neither necessary nor advisable.

From this lesson we learn...

- Ecclesiology is the study of church government.
- The church began with God's covenant with Israel.
- The mission of the church is to make disciples for Christ and nothing else.
- The church is the kingdom of God on earth and nothing else is.
- The marks of a genuine church are the faithful preaching of the word of God, the administration of the sacraments and church discipline.

Quiz

1. T The church started on the day of Pentecost, according to reformed ecclesiology.
2. T The Catholic Church denies any distinction between the visible and invisible church.
3. T In our stage of history, the kingdom of God and the church are one and the same thing.
4. F Baptists generally hold to the reformed concept of ecclesiology.
5. F The mission of the church is to make disciples for Jesus Christ and to alleviate poverty in the world.
6. V Besides Presbyterians, there exists other groups that use a reformed style of church government.
7. F The mission of the church is to alleviate poverty and heal the sick.
8. The marks of a true church are:
 - a. Preaching the gospel
 - b. Faithful administration of the sacraments/ordinances.
 - c. Discipline of sinning members.

Reading assignment: Is a Church Membership List Necessary? By Smalling.

Lesson Two: Forms of government

The question of authority

The whole issue of church government revolves around the question of authority. Who makes final decisions in the church?

We recognize Christ is the sole head of the church. However, he is in heaven and we are on earth. Therefore his rule is through human agents. Who are these agents?

Episcopal

This form is like a ladder, with the rungs representing successive ranks of authority. In Catholicism, final authority resides in one man, the Pope, who is the head of a hierarchy with ranks of officials: Cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons. This form is called *episcopal*, based on the Greek word ***episkopos***, which means “supervisor” and translates in some versions as “bishop.” The Catholic Church believes the Pope is the bishop of Rome.

In Protestantism, the Episcopal and Anglican churches use this form of government.

In some evangelical churches, final authority resides in the pastor like a local protestant Pope. Other leaders serve only to implement his policies. This is common among Baptists. In some Pentecostal or Charismatic churches, the pastor is viewed as the prophetic divine voice and therefore his authority is definitive and absolute. These churches may also therefore be classed as *episcopal*, although the hierarchy may differ from that of Catholicism.



Congregationalist

This form of government is popular among many evangelical church. Final authority resides in the congregation which decides everything by democratic vote.



Presbyterian

In reformed ecclesiology, authority resides in a committee of elders chosen by the church members. Government by elders is always plural, never by one man. This form of government is called *Presbyterian*, based on the Greek word ***presbiteros***, which means “elder.”



Pros and cons in each form of government

Episcopal

Positive

Decision-making tends to be simple and immediate because only one man has authority to make the decisions. Disciplinary cases can be dealt with expediently by not necessarily with justice because the issues depend on the criteria of one person.

Negative

It is essentially dictatorial. Many people feel uncomfortable under a dictatorship because they have no voice in the affairs of the church.

Hierarchies tend toward incompetence. In a hierarchy, employees tend to be promoted to a position higher than their abilities to function competently.

Episcopal-type governments tend to create an unbiblical distinction between the church officials and the laity, along with the spiritual concomitants inherent in that.

Congregationalist

Positive

People feel the church truly belongs to them. They feel in control.

Negative

A lot of internal politicking, frequent rebellions, church affairs often run by rumor. Doctrine because a question of opinion of the congregation as a whole, sometimes decided by democratic vote by members who have not a shred scholarship.

The pastor is obliged to please the congregation to keep his job. Voting may take place every few years to see if they keep him as pastor. Such churches sometimes change pastors frequently because the pastor finds himself in power struggles for control of the church.

Discipline is weak; applied only when a case is so crass and scandalous because the pastor is afraid to provoke division. The case must be so serious that it is obvious to all.

Church splits are common.

Presbyterian

Positive

People feel a measure of voice in their affairs because they have the right to vote for those who lead them.

The concept of a *multitude of counselors* is wise because the entire group of elders together can intervene in the case of serious internal disciplinary matters.

A church leader cannot be removed by the congregation; only by the ecclesiastical body that installed him. This avoids the dictatorship of the congregation over the leader when the congregation may be composed of people who do not know what they are doing. This sounds beautiful, but in practice things are rarely so simple. The Presbyterian pastor must please his congregation or he is an ex-pastor.

Negative

Presbyterian government is committee-based. Committees tend to be slow and inefficient.

There exists a sarcastic saying that asks: "What creature has many feet, no head, no nerves and moves very slowly?" A committee! Another sarcastic saying among Presbyterians is that a presbytery is defined as a body of ministers designed to ensure that nothing is done quickly, cheaply nor efficiently.

Slowness in dealing with serious problems.

Sometimes problems arise that require radical means of resolution. The committee-type nature of a committee is that a Presbytery tends Old Testament avoid radical measures. Usually it is good to avoid being radical but sometimes problems come up that require radical emergency surgery. In such cases, Presbyterianism tends to provide solutions that fail to resolve the problem.

Presbyterianism may fail to deal expediently with disciplinary situations.

The slowness in the judicial process and the right of appeal by the accused to an endless string of committees and tribunals tends to hinder the process. Justice may eventually be attained but Satan knows how to take advantage of delays to create confusion, bitterness and loss of members.

Presbyterianism tries resolve spiritual problems by church laws and regulations.

Spiritual problems cannot be corrected by regulations. They must be dealt with spiritually. Laws do not cast out demons. We cannot eat of the tree of knowledge alone and hope to have the benefits of the tree of life. The main thing laws produce is more laws. This was seen in Judaism and in modern society. Presbyterians have a Book of Church Order which few understand except sinning members who study it to avoid discipline...and sometimes successfully.

When a local church becomes large and influential, the pastors tend to disregard the Presbytery. They may treat the Presbytery like a mere council of advisors not to taken seriously. Although attendance at Presbytery meetings is obligatory for all pastors, those of large churches may attend Presbytery meetings only when they sweet please to so.

Do we have the right to choose which of these please us?

Although each form of government has its strengths and weakness, this is not the criteria for deciding its value. The only question to consider is which is biblical. Issues of administrative efficiency are secondary. God is more interested in the sanctification of his people than administrative efficiency.

From this lesson we learn...

- The three forms of ecclesiastical government are...
 - Episcopal
 - Congregational
 - Presbyterian
- Biblical standards have the final word as to practice of church government, not administrative efficiency.

Quiz

1. The three forms of church government practiced by different branches of Christianity are:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. ___T___ In episcopal government, final authority resides in one man.
3. ___T___ In Congregationalist government, final authority resides in democratic vote by the congregation.
4. ___T___ In Presbyterian government, final authority resides in committees of elders.
5. ___F___ Administrative efficiency is a central question in choosing a form of government.
6. ___F___ A noticeable benefit of reformed government is its promptness in dealing with urgent problems or disciplinary situations.
7. ___T___ A typical problem in Congregationalism is internal politicking.

Lesson Three: What are elders?

The word *elder* refers to church leaders in general. This general use is seen in 1 Peter 5:1,

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, ...

In the text above, Peter uses the term *elder* to describe himself although he was an apostle. However, Acts 15:2 distinguishes between the apostles and elders in the local church. ...*the apostles and elders...*

In the Old Testament, the term *elder* is used to describe a council of men who, along with the priests, govern the people under the authority of the Law of Moses.

This relationship between priests, elders and the people continued until the first century among the Jewish people and was adopted later by the apostles for the governing of Christian churches.

The Greek word for elder in the New Testament is ***presbíteros*** and occurs 67 times. The committee of elders, ***presbiterion*** occurs three times.

In the New Testament church, the term *elder* refers to spiritual leaders who have been ordained to govern the church and teach the word of God. This clear from 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5-7; Acts 14:23.

In the following chapters, we will study two types of elders, both in spiritual leadership and with functions that overlap, yet coinciding in part because of different callings and ordinations.

According to Acts 20:28, what should elders be doing? Shepherding the church.

What ministerial competence should they possess according to 1 Timothy 3:2 and titus 1:9? Ability to teach.

According to Ephesians 4:11,12, who should be doing the work of the ministry and who prepares them for it? The members of the church do the work of the ministry and the role of the leaders is to prepare them for it.

The teacher may illustrate the absurd manner in which some churches operate: Imagine a team of construction workers where the workers do nothing except applaud the supervisor who is doing all the work. This ridiculous scenario reflects how some congregations function. The pastor does all the work and the members do nothing. These pastors may suppose their busy lives are effective but they are not genuine leaders.

How many elders in each church? Plural or singular?

In the entirety of biblical history, the term *elder* was always plural. The only time when one person was in authority over Israel was when the people of God were in a state of apostasy. Likewise in the local church. There is no such thing in the New Testament as one elder in charge of a congregation.

Notice the plurality in the following verses: Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. Acts 20:17

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. 1Tim. 4:14

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— Titus 1:5

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. James 5:14

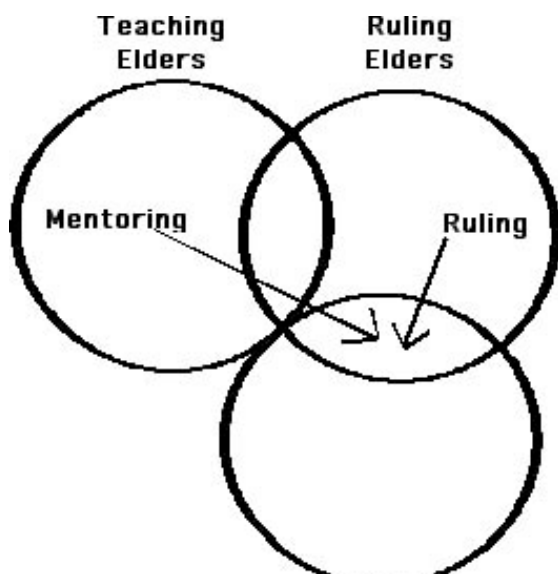
Bishops and elders: Are these the same office?

Are the terms *bishop* and *elder* interchangeable? See Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-7; Phil.1:1

According to Acts 20:28, what is a function in common with all elders?

Note: The Greek term for *care for* is *poimaino*, which means *to shepherd*.

How the two classes of elder relate to each other



In this diagram, we notice the ruling elders are objects of the ministry of the teaching elders, because the former are members of the congregation.

Note the teaching elders have this relationship with the ruling elders, *not because of superiority of rank*, but because the ruling elders are members of the congregation

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17

Ruling elders must recognize the mentoring and discipleship function of the teaching elders toward them because:

- They also, like the members of the congregation, are recipients of the teaching ministry of the teaching elder.
- They are also recipients of the administration of the sacraments, just as other members of the congregation.
- The minister is to live of the gospel in a sense that they do not. (1 Corinthians 9)

The rights of elders

What is due to elders in 1 Timothy 5:17? Honor

What is due to elders in 1 Timothy 5:19? Protection from accusations without evidence.

What is due to elders in 1 Thessalonians 5:13? Respect and esteem

Conclusion: While both types of elder have spiritual authority over the congregation, the teaching elder has spiritual authority over the ruling elders when it comes to teaching ministry and administering the sacraments.

From this lesson we learn...

- The office of elder in the church is always plural.
- The terms *bishop* and *elder* are synonyms. The word *elder* is the title of the office, whereas *bishop*, meaning overseer, is a description of his function.
- Both ruling and teaching elders govern the church. But the teaching elder has a mentoring function to the ruling elder because the latter is also part of the congregation.
- The primary function of all church leaders is to prepare other Christians for ministry, especially training leaders.
- Elders have the right to the honor and respect of those they serve.

Reading assignment: Extraordinary Offices by Roger Smalling

Quiz

1. T Los términos *obispo* y *anciano* son utilizados indistintamente en el Nuevo Testamento y se refieren al mismo oficio.
2. T A través del Nuevo Testamento, el término *anciano* es siempre plural cuando se refiere al gobierno de la iglesia.
3. T Todos los ancianos están llamados a tener un ministerio pastoral dentro de la iglesia en algún aspecto.
4. T La función principal de todos los ancianos es la de preparar a los miembros de la congregación para el ministerio.

Lesson Four: The Old Testament Origins of Church Government

New Testament church government is a fulfillment and simplification of Old Testament principles. **FIRST CORINTHIANS NINE** shows the apostles took this for granted because they appealed to the Old Testament as authority.

Some Corinthians were questioning Paul's apostleship and apparently doing so based on an argument having to do with his right to receive offerings. Paul argues his point by applying Old Testament principles governing the material support of the Levite priests as applicable to New Testament ministers preaching the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 8-9, to what does Paul appeal as authority for his right to abstain from secular labor? The Law of Moses. The point: Support of the New Testament minister is the fulfillment of an Old Testament command.

In V.9-10, he quotes from Deut.25:4. For whom does he claim this text was written? For our sake, not just the Old Testament believers.

In verse 10-11, Paul uses an illustration to justify his position. Why is that illustration logical? Paul considers it illogical that a minister should sow spiritual truth in the lives of people without reaping material benefits just as with Old Testament priests.

In verse 11, to what does he liken spiritual truth dispensed by ministers? Seed sown for a harvest.

In verse 11-12, what does the minister have a right to reap? Material benefits from his spiritual labors.

According to verse 11, should the support given full-time ministers be regarded as charity or as earned? See also Matthew 10:10 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18 It is wages earned, not charity. Ministers of the gospel must not be regarded as objects of charity.

In verse 13, from what Old Testament command does Paul draw his conclusion about the right of support without secular labor? From the temple service by the priests. Lev. 6:16, 26; 7:6; Num. 5:9, 10; 18:8-20; Deut. 18:1

In verse 14, is Paul's statement a command or a suggestion? Old Testament Levite priests ate from the sacrificial offering.

This was not only a privilege for them but they were also commanded to do so. Likewise with the New Testament minister. He is commanded to live of the gospel.
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In verses 13-14 who were those who served at the altar? See Num.18:8-20 The Levite priests only. Anyone else was considered a usurper. Paul claims this to be a fore type of the support for the New Testament minister.

Discussion question: What are the practical consequences of understanding **FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER NINE**?

From 1Cor.9, we learn...

- There exists a category of ministers called to full-time preaching of the gospel as distinct from any other ministerial calling.
- Their support is to be derived from offerings.
- This support is to be regarded as earned, not as charity.
- The Old Testament support of the Levite priests is a fore-type and pattern for the support of gospel-preaching ministers in this dispensation.

Quiz

Circle the letter with the correct answer.

1. The origins of New Testament ecclesiology are found in...
 - A. The Old Testament
 - B. A special revelation of Paul, independent of any other source.
2. The concept of a gospel minister dedicated to full time Christian service has its antecedents in...
 - A. The Old Testament priesthood.
 - B. A special revelation of Jesus in the gospels.
3. The financial support of a minister is...
 - A. Charity from the church.
 - B. Earned salary.
4. Paul's requirement for the support of gospel ministers was....
 - A. A good suggestion.
 - B. A command.

Lesson Five: Elders and the Representative Principle in the Old Testament

We saw there exists a category of ministers appointed over the people of God for spiritual oversight. In this section, we will see a body of spiritual leaders who exercise government over God's people but who are not full time ministers. ⁸

The first mention of elders in the Bible as a governing body over the people of God is in Exodus.

The representative principle

Exodus 3:16,17; 19:6,7

When God wanted to talk to the people of Israel, who did he tell Moses to gather? Elders of Israel.

When God said he had observed the sufferings of Israel, to whom was he speaking to? To all the "people" as represented by the elders.

God made a promise in this text. What was the promise and to whom was it addressed? ^{Mark} The promise was to bring the people out of Egypt. It was made to all the people via the elders as their representatives.

This shows how the concept of representation by elders was taken for granted from the earliest times.

Exodus 4:29-31

Who did Moses and Aaron gather together? All the elders of the people.

Who spoke the words of the Lord? Moses and Aaron

Who is counted as having seen the signs Moses did and believed? All the people as represented by the elders who were the ones present who saw the signs.

(Hint: Was the entire congregation present or not?)

In this incident, who represented God and who represented the people? Moses as the prophet-priest represented God. The elders represented the people.

1 Samuel 8:4,7,10,19

(Fill in the blanks)

Then all the elders gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁹

And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you..."¹⁰

From these texts, what can we conclude about representation in the Old Testament? The full-time ministers in the Old Testament, prophets and priests, represented God to the people. The elders represented the people to God.

Deut. 21:18-21

Did elders have judicial functions also? Yes. Both to act as judges and executioners of a sentence.

Deut.31:9

To whom was the law, the Word of God, committed for safekeeping? First to the priests and then to the elders.

Ex.12:21,27; Lev.4:13-21

Were the elders sometimes allowed to participate in the sacrifices? If so, by what authority? Yes, under the authority of the priests.

Note: In the Bible, the phrase, “priests of the Lord” occurs about ten times, never as “priests of the people.” The phrase “elders of the people” is also found about ten times, never as “elders of the Lord.” The representative principle is clear: The priests represented the voice of the Lord to the people. The elders represented the voice of the people to the Lord.

Did the same structure among the Jews carry over to New Testament times?

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, Matt. 26:3

A problem

In some churches, elders treat the minister as their employee. This is an abomination. IN the New Testament, elders do not rule over ministers.

In the Old Testament, such an attitude of elders trying to rule over priests would be seen as presumptuous and arrogant. Elders did not tell priests how to teach or offer sacrifices.

The minister is not an employee of the church, except for income tax purposes. He is an employee of Jesus Christ.

The minister holds a position of mentoring and discipleship toward elders which elders do not have toward him.

Discussion question: Compare the representative principle with hierarchical government and one-man rule. Discuss the practical consequences on the church.

From this lesson we learn...

- From earliest times, there has been a category of leaders among God’s people called *elders* who represented the people and were not priests.

- The decisions of the elders decisions were considered the voice of the congregation.
- Under the authority of the priests, elders participated in sacerdotal functions, including sacrifices and reading of Scripture to the people.
- Jews practiced this form of government into New Testament times.

Quiz

Circle the letter with the correct answer.

1. The *representative principle* refers to...
 - a. The right of the people to choose who will be their prophet.
 - b. The representation of the people to God through the office of elder.
2. In relation to the right to offer sacrifices, the elders...
 - a. Had the same authority as the priests.
 - b. Always functioned under the authority of the priests.
3. The voice of the people before God was expressed by...
 - a. Decisions of the elders.
 - b. Popular vote of the congregation.

Lesson Six: Elders and the Representative Principle in the New Testament

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder... 1Pet.5:1

In the above text, Peter uses the term to describe himself, although he was an apostle. From this we see the term *elder* refers to spiritual leaders in general in the New Testament.

What should elders be doing?

The functions of elders must logically be connected to the mission of the church which is the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. This means making disciples for Christ. It is questionable if elders unwilling to do this should be elders.

According to 2 Timothy 2:2, what is the principle product that leaders should be producing? Other leaders

The Book of Acts

The first mention of Christian elders in the New Testament is Acts 11:28-30 when Antioch Christians sent famine relief to believers in Jerusalem. Where in this text do we find a representative principle? In V.29, the relief is sent to “the brothers,” i.e., the congregations in general. Then in V.30, it was sent by Paul and Barnabas to “the elders.” Thus, the elders were viewed as in charge of the congregations and therefore in charge of the distribution to them.

The next mention of elders is in Acts 14:23.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23

Important note: The term *appointed* in the original Greek is ***cheirotoneo*** and means, “To vote by stretching out the hand.” This is the first hint in the New Testament of a semi-democratic principle.

How many elders were appointed in each church? No number is mentioned. The word is plural.

Therefore, a minimum of two in a church was standard, probably more. From this, and other texts, we derive the concept of plurality of eldership.

With what activity was their appointment associated? Prayer and fasting. This denotes the seriousness of ordination.

According to Acts 16:4, who has authority to make decisions regarding doctrine? Is it the elders, the congregation or a combination of the two? A body of elders is the only authority to make doctrinal decisions, not one man or a congregation.

In this case, the Jerusalem assembly of elders was viewed as having authority to impose doctrine on individual churches.

What is the word used to describe them and what does it mean?
Overseer. One who supervises the work of others.

Greek= *episkopos*. This word had been translated as Bishop in other versions, to support the idea of a hierarchy among elders, an unscriptural notion.

Who does Paul say appointed them and how does this square with the democratic principle in Acts 14:23? _____¹¹

Though the people choose the elders, it is assumed that this process was the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it was the Holy Spirit who is viewed as the one having appointed them, not the people.

Did elders have a judicial function as well according to Acts 20:28-30? Yes. They must distinguish between wolves and sheep.

Apostolic assumptions: 1Tim.5:17-19

At first, these verses may seem ambiguous for defining distinctions among elders, their roles and means of support. When we take into account that Paul and Timothy were heirs of 1400 years of Jewish history and custom, these verses become strikingly clear. Paul could assume Timothy understood what he was talking about without going into details of Jewish history. Under this light certain aspects of the New Testament elder's life and ministry become evident.

If the apostles meant something new by the term *elder*, they would have clarified it.

What does Paul assume to be the function in common to all elders? Ruling

What two classes of spiritual leaders are implied here? Those who rule primarily and those who teach primarily.

Did Paul assume an overlapping in functions among elders? If so, what was the overlapping? Yes. Both may administrate at times and both may teach at times.

To what aspect of ministry does Paul give priority of importance? Preaching and teaching.

Note:: The term *honor* is a play on words in Greek. The word is **time** and means either “honor” or “salary,” depending on the context. In this context we will see that Paul means both at the same time when he speaks for the teaching elder. Those in full time service should be alleviated from secular pursuits.

How does the quote about muzzling oxen relate to what Paul said in 1Cor.9:9? Muzzling an ox is an illustration of the injustice of depriving the minister of adequate support.

In the statement, *The laborer deserves his wages*, who is Paul quoting here and in what context? Mt.10:10 cf Lev.19:13 He is quoting Jesus, who in turn is reflecting a principle in the Law of Moses.

What is required to bring a charge against an elder? What is the background for this injunction? See Deut.19:15 Two or three witnesses. Paul takes his cue from this judicial requirement in the Mosaic Law.

The concept of Presbytery

The Greek word *presbiterion* is used three times in the New Testament.
Luke 22:66; Acts 22:5; 1Timothy 4:14

In Luke 22:16, *the assembly of elders* (**presbiterion**) gathered together. Of what people did this assembly consist? The priests and scribes, i.e., both classes of leaders.

In Acts 22:5, who possessed the judicial authority to send Saul of Tarsus to Damascus? The high priest and the assembly of elders, i.e., the Jewish Presbytery.

In the New Testament church, who had authority to ordain? 1Timothy 4:14 The council of elders, i.e., Presbytery.

From this section we learn...

- The apostolic mindset regarding Christian elders is rooted in their Jewish background and practices under the Law of Moses. This is shown by:
 - Recognition of two kinds of spiritual leaders, one of which is the high calling to teach and preach, as in the Old Testament.
 - There is overlapping in the functions of different kinds of spiritual leaders.
 - The teaching elder in particular is to be both honored for his work of preaching and teaching and amply supported. Paul quotes from Deut.25 to substantiate this.
 - Paul quotes from Jesus for demonstrate the material support of teaching elders.

- A council of elders, called a Presbytery, makes decisions as a committee, not rule by one man.

Quiz

Circle the letter in front of the correct answer.

1. The *representative principle* refers to...
 - A. The right of the people to choose who shall be their prophet.
 - B. The representation of the people before God through the office of elder.
2. As regards the right to offer sacrifices, the elders...
 - A. Have the same authority as the priests.
 - B. Always function under the authority of the priests.
3. The voice of the people before God was expressed by...
 - A. The decisions of the elders.
 - B. Democratic vote by the congregation.

Lesson Seven: Are there two classes of elders?

The purpose of this section is to show there is one office of elder, divided into two distinct classes, ruling and teaching. Overlapping of functions does not indicate equivalence.

The latter are also called *ministers* or *pastors* and alone have authority to administer the sacraments and the word of God to the people in public worship. In this sense, teaching elders have a discipleship function toward ruling elders that the latter do not have toward them, even though both “rule” over the congregation.

Old Testament background

Preserving the word of God

To whom was committed the word of God? Priests alone? Priests and elders together? If both, to which was it given first? Deut. 31:9; Ex. 19:7

To both, but to the priests first, since their job was to expound the law to the people and preserve it.

Sacramental functions

Did elders participate in offering the sacrifices? If so, under what authority? Lev. 4:13-17
Elders participated in offering the sacrifices but it is the priest who administered the blood.

From this we can see an overlapping in spiritual function but the priest always leads and the elders never have authority to act alone. The same carries over to the sacramental functions in the New Testament church.

What implications does this have in the New Testament church? _____

This shows elders had a spiritual function, not just a political appointment. Their spiritual participation did not make them equivalent to the priests, despite this overlapping.

The term *minister*

The manner in which the Bible uses the word *minister* underlines the concept that there exists two different classes of spiritual leaders because the teaching elder is a minister in a sense the ruling elder is not.

The term *minister* is used about 40 times in the Old Testament in conjunction with priests and never in reference to elders. An example is,

...the Levites the priests, my ministers. Jer. 33:21

New Testament application

Does the Old Testament concept of priests as ministers, carry over to New Testament gospel preachers? Rom.15:16 Yes

To what does Paul compare himself in this text? Paul uses Old Testament priesthood language to justify his New Testament designation as a minister.

Notice the terms *minister*, *priestly service* and *offering*. This shows how the apostolic mindset connected a call to preach the gospel full time, to a distinct class called *ministers*.

Organizing pastors: Timothy and Titus

Paul also sent two men, Timothy and Titus in his place with authority to perform certain functions.

What does Paul call Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:6 and what were his duties toward the congregation? _____

In some translations, it is *servant*, which is equivalent to *minister*. His duties were to teach the whole church. If Ephesians 4:12, *pastor-teacher* is a pastoral office, then Timothy was a pastor.

What did Paul send Titus to do in Titus 1:5? Does this imply he was a pastor? Set the church in order and ordain elders. What other office could this be but an organizing pastor?

What was the relationship of these men to other elders in the church? They had the authority to ordain elders, including evaluate who was qualified. This alone shows a distinction.

Note: In Presbyterian denominations, these two classes of elders are called *teaching elder*, referring to the ordained full time minister, and *ruling elder*, usually laymen. The combination of these two is what other denominations call the church board.

How do these two classes of elder relate to one another?

The teaching elders (ministers) have a mentoring relationship to the elders since the latter are members of the congregation. The ministers have this function, not because of a superiority of rank but because of the nature of the relationship of the elders as part of the minister's flock.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17

The ruling elder should acknowledge the function of discipleship on the part of the teaching elder (minister) because:

- Like other members of the congregation, they are recipients of the teaching ministry of the ministers.
- They are recipients of the sacraments administered by the minister, like other members of the church.
- The minister lives from the gospel in a sense that the elders do not. (1 Corinthians 9)

From this lesson we learn...

- There was a category of officials presiding at the altars whose function was to proclaim the word of God and offer sacrifices, i.e., sacraments. These were priests.
- There was a category of officials helping the above, whose primary function was governmental. These were elders.
- There was over-lapping of both governmental and sacerdotal participation, but the distinctions between the two offices were never confused.
- The priests alone were called ministers.
- The same pattern carries through to the New Testament in that those ordained to the teaching of the word and organization of churches are also called ministers.
- Therefore, while New Testament elders may participate in administering the word of God and sacraments, they do so under the authority of ministers. This does not make them pastors or equivalent to New Testament ministers in sacerdotal authority.

Quiz

True or false questions

1. ___F___ In the Old Testament, the preservation of the word of God was entrusted to the priests alone.
2. ___F___ Sometimes the word *minister* in the Bible is used to describe ruling elders.
3. ___F___ The term *elders of Israel* was used frequently in the Old Testament to describe priests.

4. ___T___ In the New Testament, the teaching elders (ministers) have the right to ordain ruling elders.
5. ___T___ Both classes of elder have authority with regard to the governing of the congregation.
6. ___F___ Both classes of elders have the same authority with regard to mutual discipleship.

Lesson Eight: The ordination of elders

Three aspects must combine for a man to be ordained: Call, character and competence. These are in order of importance. A man may very well be of good character and capable and still not be called to the office. Or, he may be called but needs training in character and competence. The question of call is supremely important. A pastor looking for leadership candidates must never forget that competence and character alone is no proof of a call to the office of elder.

Example: The Old Testament priesthood was reserved for Levites. There may have been many men from other tribes who could have done the work of the ministry as well or better than the Levites. That was not the issue. The only issue was God's call and appointment.

The call

The concept of call to ministry is found throughout both Testaments. With regard to the priesthood we see...

And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when _____¹² just as Aaron was. Heb. 5:4

Acts 13:1-3: Paul and Barnabas

From who did the call to ministry come? The Holy Spirit

To whom did the Holy Spirit speak about that call? The other leaders

Who set Paul and Barnabas apart for the ministry and how? The leaders by prayer and fasting and laying on of hands.

What would be a first indication to an individual that he may be called to the office of elder, according to 1 Timothy 3:1? Desire for it, assuming the motivation is to serve.

What is a key quality for calling to ministry in 1 Timothy 1:12? Faithfulness

The character: 1 Timothy 3

Much has been written on this chapter in the context of Christian leadership, so we will not elaborate here, except for a couple of points often misunderstood.

Discuss the meaning of...

And let them also be tested first then let them serve. 1Timothy 3:10.

If a person has the character qualities in this chapter, does this automatically qualify him to be ordained? No. They qualify a person to be a candidate to be trained. Otherwise there would be no need to test them first before laying hands on them in ordination.

Discussion question: According to 1Timothy 3:6, what is likely to happen if a new convert is ordained to the office of elder? He will fall into pride.

The competence

Some think that the character qualities in 1 Timothy 3 are sufficient for ordination. If that were correct, there would not be other necessary qualities mentioned.

What is the one ministerial skill in 1Tim.3 required of all elders? Able to teach.

According to Titus 1:9, what must an elder able to do? Able to instruct in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it.

This means they must know their doctrine, be able to teach it and of strong enough character to rebuke those who oppose it.

According to 2 Corinthians 3:4-6, from where does our competence come? From God. Nevertheless, this competency must be demonstrated before ordination.

Discussion: Have we found in 1 Timothy 3 the three elements; call, character and competence?

The process

Who chooses the leaders?

In Acts 6:1-6, who chose the deacons and who laid hands on them? The congregation chose the deacons and the apostles laid hands on them, thus ordaining them.

Who ordains?

In 1 Timothy 4:14, who laid hands on Timothy for ordination? The Presbytery, the council of elders.

What is the Greek word used here for the group that laid on hands? ***Presbyterion:*** Council of elders, from which we derive the word “presbytery.”

Who *set apart* Paul and Barnabas and by what authority? The body of spiritual leaders set them apart by the command of the Holy Spirit.

How is ordination done?

In Acts 13:1-3, what two actions accompanied the ordination of Paul and Barnabas? Prayer and fasting and then laying on of hands.

The problem of simplicity

The Old Testament ordination of priests was a complex and ritualistic affair, requiring two weeks of preparation, involving fasting, anointing with oil, bathing, laying of hands and highly decorative garments reserved only for the priests. ¹³

The psychological effect on the Jewish congregation must have been profound. Such elaborate proceeding was apparently designed to communicate the sacred nature of ordination. Both the office and the person holding it must be treated with reverence.

In this lies a psychological problem in the way people today may perceive New Testament rites. If the rite is less complex, then perhaps it is not as sacred.

For example, the Lord's Supper is both a fulfillment and simplification of the Passover feast. The complexity is left behind. Is it less sacred for that? Apparently certain Corinthians took that attitude and Paul had to correct them. If it were less sacred, then why did God threaten Christians who partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner? ¹⁴

Ordination to gospel ministry in the New Testament is simple. Does this mean it is less sacred? If the Old Testament priesthood was a fore-type, the answer is no. The complexity is left behind, not the sacred nature of it.

From this lesson we learn...

- Call to ministry is based on God's choice, not our own.
- Character qualities are important but general competency is also essential.
- Though the call comes from the Holy Spirit, the church leaders ordain through the laying on of hands. Congregations do not ordain leaders.
- The ordination of elders is no less sacred than the ordination of priests in the Old Testament, though the rite is supremely simple.

Quiz

True and false questions

1. ___F___ If a candidate for ordination has all the character qualities necessary for ordination in 1 Timothy 3, this is all he needs to be considered qualified.
2. ___T___ All elders, including ruling elders, must be able to defend sound doctrine.
3. ___F___ The ordination of teaching elders (ministers) takes place through the laying on of hands of the congregation.

4. ___T___ Ordination to the office of minister of the gospel is equally serious and sacred today as was the ordination of priests in the Old Testament.
5. ___T___ All church officials should demonstrate competence before being ordained.

Lesson Nine: Deacons

The outline for this lesson on deacons, along with certain comments, has been taken from a sermon delivered by Dr. Nathan Parker at Pinelands Presbyterian Church in Miami, Florida on May 3, 2015; used by permission of Dr. Parker.

Why deacons? Acts 6:1-6

There exists a need to alleviate the minister from whatever would distract him from teaching, administering sacraments and supervision of the church. Works of mercy and administration of the material aspects of the church are deacon functions. ¹⁵

What was the problem? Neglect of widows in the daily distribution of necessities.

Neglect of widows in the daily distribution of necessities. Ministers are often avalanched with secondary matters. When individuals have problems, even minor ones, they often resort to contacting the pastor. Deacons can alleviate much of that. Deacons can visit those with needs that do not require pastoral intervention so the pastor can focus his areas of calling.

Who chooses the deacon candidates? The congregation chooses. This can be done by nominations or by suggestions from the session.

Who laid hands on them in ordination? Elders; the apostles in this case.

Explain here that the congregation has no authority to ordain or appoint. Only ordained elders have that authority.

What were the primary qualifications of Stephen? Full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Explain that spiritual qualifications are of more importance than the ability to handle material matters. Why? Because deacons are to be involved in works of mercy, like the widow distribution mentioned above. This will often entail practical counseling. Deacons are servants but not waiters.

Character qualities, 1Timothy 3:8-12

In this list of qualifications, what is the one absent from those found in elders? Able to teach.

This does not say that elders must necessarily have the gift of teaching. They must be able to do it competently. Those ordained to the office of minister, must be gifted to teach or preach. Godly men who have all the elder qualifications but cannot teach a Sunday School lesson effectively, should not be elders.

Which verse shows that deacons must have a minimal of theological understanding and how is this expressed? Holding the mystery of the faith. This means a clear understanding of Christian theology in its basics.

The term mystery in the New Testament, when referring to the gospel, does not mean something incomprehensible. It means something revealed which was not known before, i.e., the gospel as revealed in the Messiah, Jesus.

According to V.10, what must take place first before they are ordained? They must be “tested first.” We ordain people already doing the ministry to which they will be ordained.

We ordain deacons because they ARE deacons in practice. The same with elders. We ordain officers to the ministry they are already performing.

Discussion: What is meant by verse 13? Why does serving as deacons, in particular, result in a *good standing* and *great confidence in the faith*.¹⁶

Asking this question of the students at this point is good to help generate feedback and give the teacher the opportunity to see where they are in the grasp of the essentials. One answer is that the service nature of this ministry gives a man the opportunity to experience the spirit of Christ in a way in which other ministries may not. A deacon often performs services beyond the view of others and receives no accolades such as a minister might receive for a good sermon. The deacon’s service is frequently hidden, though vital, and he can learn much about the spirit of Christ this way. God rewards this, apparently, not only in the life to come but presently, with a depth of character that is truly the mind of Christ. The teacher may refer to Philippians 2, to elaborate this point. Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.

Errors made in choosing deacons

- Choosing men just because they are good with their hands.¹⁷

Discuss the difference between being capable in areas church maintenance versus good with people. We have seen examples of deacons good with their hands but who relate poorly to people. They may repair a door properly but not be able to counsel a widow. These are not deacons.

- Choosing because they are popular and well liked.

This is a common error and it is tragic. The ability to please people is not equivalent to the ability to please God. They must be spiritual men, yet with practical sense also.

Are the qualifications too high?

“The qualifications are high enough so that not everyone can do it. Yet not so high that no one can. It requires being ‘full of the Holy Spirit.’”

Quiz

1. ___T___ The office of deacon has to do with the material aspects of the church, along with works mercy.
2. ___F___ Deacons were chosen and ordained by the congregation.
3. ___T___ The only qualification that a deacon does not need, in comparison with elders is the ability to teach.
4. ___T___ Deacons must have the same character qualities as those of elders with the exception of the ability to teach.
5. ___T___ Deacon must be sound in doctrine as qualification for ministry.

Lesson Ten: The ordination of women

The question of women's ordination boils down to the difference between *creation* and *culture*.

Those who hold to the ordination of women to ecclesiastical office, point out that women are equal to men. From this they assume that excluding them from ministerial office is based on outmoded cultural norms of the past. This view is called **egalitarianism**.

Since women today have competed successfully with men in such domains as business and politics, egalitarians see no reason for excluding them from leadership within the church. Refusing them, it is argued, is simply discrimination, based on bygone prejudice.

Those who reserve ordination solely for men, base their thinking on God's purposes in creation before cultures existed. This view is called **complimentarianism** because they say the woman was created to compliment man in his created purpose, that of caretaker of the earth for God's glory.

The burden of proof

To overthrow 3500 years of Jewish and Christian practice, egalitarians must show from the biblical text itself that the reason for excluding women from authority in the church was cultural. Merely affirming it was cultural, is not proof. Accusing complimentarians of chauvinism or prejudice is not proof either.

In this study, we will see that the apostles were very conscious of cultural considerations, yet paid no attention to that when it came to themes that looked back at creation before cultures existed.

Egalitarian argument: Image of God

Egalitarians affirm the equality of women with men on the ground of the concept of the image of God in man. They point out such texts as Genesis 1:27 and Galatians 3:28. If women are equally the image of God and with equal status before God as his children, why then may they not be viewed as equal in the question of ordination.

Our equality as images of God does not annul the gender differences between male and female. 1 Peter 3:1-7; Ephesians 5:22,23. (Dissertation of Knight. See *Additional Readings*.)

The differences exist because the woman has a created purpose different from man— to be his helper. This is a creation-based difference that defines her purpose without changing her value as the image of God. This transcends any cultural considerations. This is clear from Paul's explanation in 1 Corinthians 11.

Does the male leadership in the home extend to the church?

Both sides of the issue recognize the husband as head of the wife because this is plainly taught in Scripture, (Ephesians 5:22,23.) Nevertheless, egalitarians insist that the home and church are separate institutions and therefore the headship of the man in the home is not relevant to ecclesiology. Complimentarians insist that the two institutions are distinct but not separate and therefore male leadership extends to the church.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

Are they separate? Or, does the male headship in the household carry over to the church? Let's see what Paul says:

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 11 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 12 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 13 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor 14 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. 1Tim.2:11-15

What are the two things Paul does not permit women to do in the church? Verse 12
Teach or exercise authority over men

What is the first reason Paul gives for this prohibition? Verse 13 Man was created first.
On this basis he has priority.

What is the second reason Paul gives for this prohibition? Eve was deceived. This implies a vulnerability of women to spiritual deception.

Discussion: Discuss what is meant by *she shall be saved through childbearing—...*

The verse is intended to be protective, not discriminatory. The clause *saved through childbearing* does not mean childbearing has saving value nor is this a moral obligation on all women to have children. He simply means the primary role of women is husbands and children. If we put them into roles for which they were not created, we subject them to pressures they were not intended to handle. It is the man's job to deal with snakes in the garden.

From these verses, what can be deduced about the relationship between the home and the church as institutions? Are they totally independent of one another or not?

In the mind of the apostles, there is a clear overlapping. Different institutions but not separate; both governed by Christ as head. This headship is expressed through the male gender.

1 Corinthians 11:1-6 — Argument on the grounds of divine hierarchy

In verse 3, what is the original creation hierarchy? God, Christ, mankind in that order.

Paul makes it clear that putting women in positions of authority in the church would be like putting the church in authority over Christ.

What is the man's calling in verse 7? Image and glory of God.

What is the woman's calling in verse 7? The glory of the man.

Is there a difference between the image of God in the man and the image of God in the woman? See verse 8.

The difference is not in the value or the nature of the image of God itself but in the order in which it was derived. The image of God in the man can first, derived directly from God. The image of in woman followed, derived indirectly through the man.

In light of this, how does that relate to the question of authority? _____

Any authority the woman may exercise must be through the man. This in itself establishes authority relative to the home and to the church.

How does Adam's call of God to be caretaker of the earth reflect on the question of authority? _____

If God made the woman to be man's helper in his work, then by the nature of the case, she would not have authority over him.

Does the authority of the man in the church imply that he is independent of the woman? See verses 11,12. No, they are interdependent. Men, in this sense, should beware of arrogance.

Does Paul show he was conscious of cultural issues? See verse 16. Yes. He used a local custom to illustrate a principal based on creation.

From this lesson we learn...

- The authority of the husband over the wife in Genesis 3 extends also to the masculine authority in the church. The reasons are:
 - Although the home and the church are different institutions, they are not separate.
 - Man is the glory of God, while woman is the glory of man.
 - Creation order. The woman was derived from man, while the man was created directly from God.

- The woman was made to be man's helper.
- The question of the ordination of women is a creation them, not a cultural one.
- Although man has authority over the woman, both in the home and in the church, this does not make him independent of the woman.
- Placing women in positions of authority in the church, exposes them to the same kind of temptations to deception as Eve confronted in the garden.
- The apostolic prohibition regarding women teaching in the church or exercising authority over the man has a protective purpose, not discriminatory.

Reading Assignment: Ordination of Women by Knight and Ordination of Deaconesses by Smalling

Quiz

True and false questions

According to apostolic teaching,

1. ___F___ The church and the home are two completely separate and distinct entities.
2. ___T___ The masculine leadership principle in Genesis extends also to the church.
3. ___F___ The reason why women are excluded from ecclesiastical offices is because they are not as capable a men.
4. ___T___ Women may teach in the church, with permission of the leadership, under the condition this does not imply exercising authority over men.
5. ___T___ Allowing women to teach in the chu with authority over the men may subject them to the kind of temptations that confronted Eve.

Chapter Eleven: The Church Courts

In this lesson we will see how the different committees of elders in reformed government relate to one another in a system of mutual accountability.

The question of accountability

Two assumptions about the local church and its accountability exist among evangelicals.

Independence of the local church.

This teaching asserts the local church has within it all that is necessary for its own government, without reference to any other entity outside it. The church and its officers are its own final authority. The church decides doctrine and procedure for itself and discipline its own members and officers.

This view is held by Baptist churches, most Pentecostals and charismatics. The Independent Baptist denomination takes its name from commitment to this doctrine.

Interdependence of the local church

This teaching says the church has within it all that is necessary for normal functions but is interdependent on a wider body of believers for accountability as to doctrine, discipline of its officers and questions of procedure in worship.

Which is correct?

The Jerusalem Council: Acts 15

In Acts 15, representatives from churches or groups of churches met in Jerusalem to consider a controversial doctrinal question.

Were Paul and Barnabas representatives of the churches to the council? V.2-3. Yes. Here enters the principle of representation of the lower court to the higher.

According to V.6, who met and decided the question? The apostles and elders.

According to Acts 16:4, was this decision a suggestion to the churches or an authoritative decree? An authoritative decree.

Greek= DOGMA, a decree. Explain how this shows the apostles and elders did not consider the churches independent of accountability to the general assembly of elders.

Explain to the students that the Independence idea makes the local church a law unto itself, which is not a biblical ideal. In reformed ecclesiology, everybody and even every court is accountable to somebody.

What can we conclude about the question of accountability of the local church?

At no time did the apostles or the early church fathers in the next few centuries ever consider local churches to be without accountability to a wider body of believers. Unfortunately, this idea carried to an extreme led to the hierarchy of Rome and its oppressions. The idea of the independence of the local church is a post-reformation concept invented largely by the founder of the Baptist movement, John Smith, in the early 1600's.

Church courts in the PCA

Biblical government, as we have seen, is a system of committees of elders. We call these committees "Courts."

In this part, we will use the PCA as the model to explain the courts because the author of this manual is more familiar with that. Other reformed denominations use different names for these courts but they function the same.¹⁸

In Presbyterian and Reformed government, there exists three and sometimes four of these committees: The General Assembly, the Synod, the Presbytery and the Session. Each of these could be called a presbytery because they are composed of presbyters. To avoid confusion, three of these committees are called by other names.

Various reformed denominations use other names than those of the PCA but the principles are the same. In the Christian Reformed Church for example, the Presbytery is called Classis.

The courts below are listed in ascending order. The higher court has jurisdiction over the lower.

Session

The governing body of elders of a local church, consisting in both types of elders. That means the pastors and the ruling elders have equal voice and vote in Session meetings. The pastor is normally the moderator. They have final authority over all church matters, govern the deacons and have authority to ordain other deacons or ruling elders. They cannot ordain pastors.

The Session has authority to discipline its ruling elders and deacons but not teaching elders (pastors).

Presbytery

In Presbyterian government, this is a council of pastors of the churches associated within a large city or region. It deals with matters in common relating to those churches. It is accountable to the General Assembly and must submit its decisions each year to a committee thereof for review.

In the Christian Reformed churches, this is called the Classis.

Presbyteries meet three or four times a year, or more if a meeting is called by the Stated Clerk.

All pastors are permanent members of the Presbytery. Each church has the right to send a certain number ruling elders as temporary members during a Presbytery meeting, according to the number of members in the church.

Pastors are ordained by the Presbytery, are members of Presbytery and are not members of a local church. They represent the Presbytery to the church and are installed by representatives from the Presbytery in a special church service.

Discipline of pastors resides with the Presbytery. The local church has no authority to discipline a pastor.

Officers of the Presbytery: Stated Clerk keeps records of the decisions and has authority to call emergency sessions of Presbytery or appoint committees or commissions. The Moderator directs procedures during the meetings. There is also a Treasurer and Secretary.

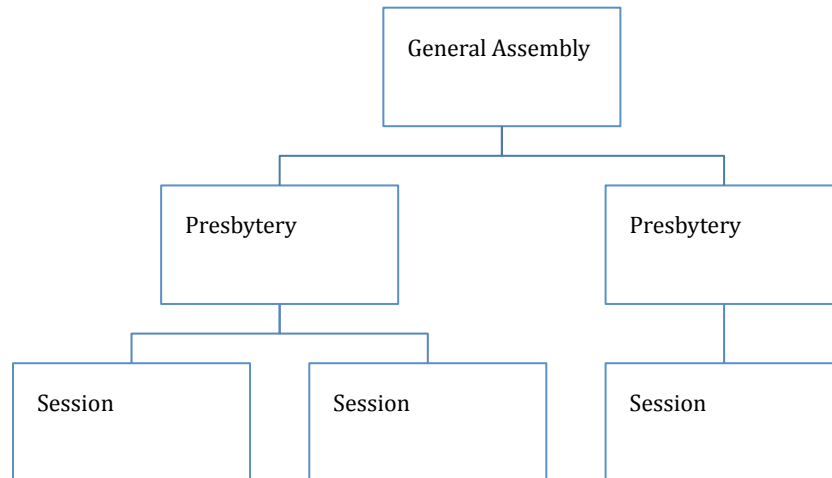
The Presbytery operates by a series of committees or commissions appointed by the Stated Clerk to conduct business between Presbytery meetings. A committee has only the authority to make recommendations to the Presbytery to decide on. Commissions have plenipotentiary authority to make decisions for the Presbytery in its absence. Most pastors are members of a committee of Presbytery and therefore have duties outside their own local church.

Synod

This is committee of representatives of Presbyteries in a large region that meets to decide issues in that region. The PCA does not have synods.

General Assembly: Acts 15

In the PCA, the General Assembly meets once a year and deals with issues presented to it by the Presbyteries.



The Constitution of the PCA

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has three documents that govern it: The Bible, the Westminster Standards and the Book of Church Order.

The Bible

This is the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice and alone is inspired scripture.

The Westminster Standards

These are the statements of faith that the PCA believes the Bible teaches. It consists of three documents: The Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

The Book of Church Order (BCO)

This deals with rules of operation of the denomination, such as limitations on how worship is to be conducted, procedures for ordinations and disciplinary matters.

Quiz

1. The three church courts of the PCA are:
 - a. The General Assembly
 - b. The Presbytery
 - c. The Session

2. The constitution of the PCA consists in:
 - a. The Bible
 - b. The Westminster Standards
 - c. The Book of Church Order

True and false questions

3. ___F___ In the reformed movement, each church is completely independent.

4. ___T___ In the reformed movement, the local church is interdependent with other associated churches.
5. ___F___ Each church has the authority to decide for itself what is good and bad doctrine.

Lesson Twelve: What is reformed worship?

In this lesson we will show the purposes, content and limitations of reformed worship, in contrast with other movements.

The purposes of worship

The glory of God

Romans 11:36 *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Discussion: Who is the audience in biblical worship? 2Chron.7:1 and Ezek.44:4. God is the audience.

The service is for his pleasure, not ours. At this point, the teacher may describe the error in some churches of arranging worship to attract or please unbelievers in attendance. These are called *seeker-friendly* churches.

The edification of believers

So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. 1 Corinthians 14:12

Show that Paul grants it as a given that edification of believers is the reason for a church meeting. The word *edify* occurs eleven times in this chapter.

The starting point

In a *formal public worship*, someone must decide what is permissible. One of two presuppositions must be our starting point. Either we do only those things God commands in Scripture or we do whatever we wish as long as God does not forbid it. Which is correct?

The first presupposition is called *the regulative principle*. The second is *non-regulative*.

The reformed movement reveals its choice with:

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men,... Westminster Confession, Chapter 1, Article 1

Since the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source. Book of Church Order, PCA 47-1

If appropriate, the teacher may mention movements that take the opposing view, such as Pentecostal and Charismatic. These allow whatever they feel is approved by the Holy Spirit, with only a loose connection to Scripture.

This is not true of all Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Some hold more strictly than others to Paul's injunction to do everything decently and in order. 1Cor.14:40. Others allow fainting, uncontrollable laughter or animal sounds on the supposed grounds that these are manifestations of the Holy Spirit and therefore legitimate. Reformed theologians consider such manifestations to be the sin of false worship, equivalent to idolatry or other pagan practices. You may mention that the above practices were unknown to the early church fathers through the fourth century.

Baptists generally hold to the regulative principle, although not as strictly as reformed churches.

Scriptural inferences

According to Deut.12:32, what did God command Israel to do regarding worship when they came out of Egypt? Do what he commanded and without adding or taking anything away. In context, this verse was in contrast to pagan worship around Israel.

Inference from the Pentateuch

God regulated how he was to be worshipped. New Testament ecclesiology is an extension of Old Testament principles. Those who would abandon the regulative principle completely as applicable to New Testament worship should show apostolic precedent to do so.

The teacher should clarify this does not mean the Old Testament is our point of reference for New Testament worship. The New Testament interprets the Old Testament, not vice versa. That is an error some reformed teachers have fallen into. How the principle is applied in New Testament worship was determined by the apostles. See next section.

See also Neh.8:18;9:3

What must be included in New Testament worship?

According to Revelation 1:3, what was done in the seven churches that John addressed? Reading of scripture.

It may be necessary to explain that throughout history, private parties normally did not own a copy of the scriptures. It was the property of the synagogue or the church and was read by a *lector* "he who reads" to the congregation, then expounded by a teacher. Revelation was written to seven churches in Asia Minor. The verse above shows the role of the *lector* in those churches.

What did Paul command Pastor Timothy to do in the church, according to 1 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Timothy 4:1-2? Preach the word

What were the Ephesians commanded to do as a church, Ephians 5:19? Sing songs, hymns and spiritual songs.

You may mention that music has always been a key element in worship from the beginning. Some Psalms were written by Asaph, a temple choirmaster. The Psalms of Ascents were written to be chanted by the people as they ascended the steps to the sanctuary.

What did Jesus call the house of God, Mt.21:13? House of prayer. Why did Peter and John go to the temple, Acts 3:1? To pray

See also Acts 12:5; 14:23.

Prayer may also include confession of sin. This is found throughout the Psalms.

What did Paul command the Corinthians to do during services the first day of the week in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2? Take up offerings.

When and where was the Lord's Supper to be celebrated? Can it be done privately or in the family? 1Cor.11:17-26? When the church comes together.

Clarify that worship as a corporate church body is the only appropriate scenario for serving the Lord's Supper. It is a celebration of that corporate unity, 1Cor.10:16. Reformed theology rejects private communion or family communion as inappropriate and not a communion service at all. It may border on the sin of false worship.

We conclude that the things commanded in New Testament worship are:

Reading of Scripture, preaching the word, prayer, music, offerings and sacraments.

These aspects are broad enough to incorporate a wide variety of cultural norms. Yet they are plain enough to place sensible guidelines. Referring to details within Old Testament law is neither necessary nor advisable since it may lead to legalism.

Refer again to CFW 1-6 *there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.*

Controversies within the reformed movement

Psalmody

The view that says only Psalms may be sung in formal public worship.

The teacher may mention here that those who hold this view have complex arguments. The majority of reformed theologians reject those arguments on the grounds of the new freedom we have in Christian worship according to the Epistles.

Music style: Contemporary or traditional?

Some associate traditional hymns with faithfulness to biblical worship. This is doubtful logic, more emotional than rational.

Others feel contemporary worship is best because unchurched people can relate better to it.

Reading assignment: Two thesis by Smalling, *Psalmody; Music in Worship*.

From this lesson we learn...

- The view that we can do in worship only those things commanded in Bible is called the *regulative principle*.
- The purposes of worship are the glory of God and the edification of believers.
- God is the audience in biblical worship.
- New Testament worship is broader and freer than Old Testament worship, although it incorporates the same basic elements.
- The elements included in reformed worship are the reading of scripture, preaching of the word of God, prayer, music, offerings and sacraments.

Exam questions

1. The purposes of a worship service are:
 - a. The glory of God
 - b. Edification of believers

True or false

2. ___F___ The view that we can do in worship whatever is not prohibited in the word of God is called the *regulative principle*.
3. ___F___ We may set aside ordinary principles of worship if we think we have a special impulse of the Holy Spirit to do so.
4. ___T___ The Lord's Supper may be celebrated only as an expression of corporate church worship.
5. ___T___ Psalmody is the view that only psalms should be sung in worship services.

Endnotes

¹ English Standard Version. All texts quoted in this document are from the ESV.

² In advanced ecclesiology, we study the details of the Presbyterian Book of Church Order, the structure of congregationalism and episcopal forms of government and their history. The intermediate level hopefully provides the framework for evaluation of these other forms.

³ Acts 9:31, the church (singular) throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. In this sense, used as the totality of all believers in a wide region. In Galatians 1:1, used of individual churches throughout a region.

⁴ The social gospel is one of these.

⁵ Schweitzer, William, Ph.D. A church planter in England with the Presbyterian Church in America. From an article, on the Aquila Report, June, 2010.

⁶ They are interchangeable, one and the same. The difference is that elder is the title of the office, while bishop is a description of the function. “Bishop” means overseer, Greek- episkopos.

⁷ Care for the church, i.e., shepherding. Ruling elders have a pastoral function also. This does not make them pastors any more helping with the Lord’s Supper makes them ministers. It is an overlapping.

⁸ I am indebted to Dr. Morton Smith of the Western Carolina Presbytery, PCA, for the proof texts on the representative principle as displayed in an excerpt from his paper, Biblical Polity. A Spanish translation of the excerpt is found at: <http://smallings.com/spanish/Ensayos/smith.html>

⁹ Elders

¹⁰ People

¹¹ Though the people choose the elders, it is assumed that this process was the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it was the Holy Spirit who is viewed as the one having appointed them, not the people.

¹² Called by God.

¹³ Exodus 29

¹⁴ 1Cor.11:29

¹⁵ It has been argued that this chapter does not refer to deacons because the word diakonos “deacon” does not occur in the original Greek. They say this is a unique event and is not a proof text regarding deacons. This view is easily refuted because the verb form of deacon occurs twice. Though the Greek word diakonos does not occur, the term diakonia “service” is found in verse 1. The verb form diakonein “to serve” occurs in verse 2. This, along with the context of the situation, is sufficient to establish that these were ordained as diakonoi, “servants.”

¹⁶ Asking this question of the students at this point is good to help generate feedback and give the teacher the opportunity to see where they are in the grasp of the essentials. One answer is that the service nature of this ministry gives a man the opportunity to experience the spirit of Christ in a way in which other ministries may not. A deacon often performs services beyond the view of others and receives no accolades such as minister might receive for a good sermon. The deacon’s service is frequently hidden, though vital, and he can learn much about the spirit of Christ this way. God rewards this, apparently, not only in the life to come but presently, with a depth of character that is truly the mind of Christ. The teacher may refer to Phil.2, to elaborate this point. Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus.

¹⁷ Discuss the difference between being capable in areas church maintenance versus good with people. We have seen examples of deacons good with their hands but who relate poorly to people. They may repair a door properly but not be able to counsel a widow. These are not deacons.

¹⁸ The Christian Reformed Church, the United Reformed Churches in America and Reformed Church in America use the term Synod to describe the General Assembly and Classis or Regional Committee to describe the Presbytery. They use Consistory [consistorio] for the local church leadership. The Mexican Presbyterian Churches use the same names as the PCA except they have Synods between the Presbytery and the General Assembly.