

The Practice of Church Government

Foundation principles

... the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. ¹ 1Tim. 3:15

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. Yet it also gives authority for leaders to make decisions while avoiding the dictatorial 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...

- There exists only one form of church government endorsed by God in scripture.
- 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 based on the whole Bible.

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

Overview: The question of authority

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?

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

- In Catholicism, final authority resides in one man, the Pope. This generates a hierarchy appointed to carry out his decrees.

- In some churches, final authority resides in the pastor, like a local protestant pope. Any other leaders exist to assist him and apply his policies. In some Pentecostal circles, the pastor is viewed as a divine prophetic voice and therefore ultimate authority.
- In congregationalism, a popular form of government in many evangelical churches, final authority resides in the congregation that decides everything by democratic vote.
- In reformed government, authority resides in a committee of elders chosen by the people. Elder-rule is always plural, never by one man.

We will see reformed government as 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 into 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.

When we see these principles as a unit, the divine genius behind them becomes clear. They provide a workable balance between form and freedom that allows for Christ to express his headship in the church, to the glory of God.

Lesson: The Old Testament origins of New Testament 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 with 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 V.8-9, to what does Paul appeal as authority for his right to abstain from secular labor? _____³

In V.9-10, he quotes from Deut.25:4. For whom does he claim this text was written? _____⁴

In V.10-11, Paul uses an illustration to justify his position. Why is that illustration logical? _____⁵

In V.11, to what does he liken spiritual truth dispensed by ministers? _____⁶

In V.11-12, what does the minister have a right to reap? _____⁷

According to V.11, should the support given full-time ministers be regarded as charity or as earned? See also Mt.10:10 and 1Tim.5:17-18
_____⁸

In V.13, from what Old Testament command does Paul draw his conclusion about the right of support without secular labor? _____⁹
Lev. 6:16, 26; 7:6; Num. 5:9, 10; 18:8-20; Deut. 18:1

In V.14, is Paul's statement a command or a suggestion? _____¹⁰

In V. 13-14 who were those who *served at the altar*? See Num.18:8-20
_____¹¹

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.

Lesson: 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.¹²

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

Ex. 3:13-17

When God wanted to talk to the people of Israel, who did he tell Moses to gather? _____¹³

When God said he had observed the sufferings of Israel, to whom was he speaking to? _____¹⁴

God made a promise in this text. What was the promise and to whom was it addressed? _____¹⁵

Ex.4:29-31

Who did Moses and Aaron gather together? _____¹⁶

Who spoke the words of the Lord? _____¹⁷

Who is counted as having seen the signs Moses did and believed? _____¹⁸

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

In this incident, who represented God and who represented the people? _____¹⁹

1Sam.8:4,7,10,19

(Fill in the blanks)

*Then all the _____gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah.*²⁰

*And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the _____in all that they say to you..."*²¹

*Samuel then said to _____, "Go every man to his city."
1Sam. 8:22²²*

From these texts, what can we conclude about representation in the Old Testament?

23

Deut. 21:18-21

Did elders have judicial functions also? _____

24

Deut.31:9

To whom was the law, the Word of God, committed for safekeeping?

25

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

Were the elders sometimes allowed to participate in the sacrifices? If so, by what authority? _____

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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 _____ gathered in the
palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, Matt. 26:3²⁷*

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

From this section 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.
- Their 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.

Lesson: 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.

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? _____²⁸

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.²⁹

How many elders were appointed in each church? _____³⁰

With what activity was their appointment associated? _____³¹

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?

_____³²

Acts 20:17,28

In these verses, Paul exhorts the elders of the church in Ephesus.

What is the job of all elders? _____³³

What is the word used to describe them and what does it mean?

_____³⁴

Who does Paul say appointed them and how does this square with the democratic principle in Acts 14:23? _____³⁵

Did elders have a judicial function as well? _____³⁶

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?
_____³⁷

What two classes of spiritual leaders are implied here?
_____³⁸

Did Paul assume an overlapping in functions among elders? If so, what was the overlapping? _____³⁹

To what aspect of ministry does Paul give priority of importance?
_____⁴⁰

How does the quote about muzzling oxen relate to what Paul said in 1Cor.9:9? _____⁴¹

In the statement, *The laborer deserves his wages*, who is Paul quoting here and in what context? Mt.10:10 cf Lev.19:13
_____⁴²

Note: The term *honor* is a play on words in Greek. The word is *timé* and means either *honor* or *wages*, depending on the context. The context shows he means both at the same time with regard to the teaching elder.

What is required to bring a charge against an elder? What is the background for this injunction? See Deut.19:15 _____⁴³

The concept of Presbytery

The Greek word *presbiterion* is used three times in the New Testament.

Luke 22:66; Acts 22:5; 1Tim. 4:14

In Luke 22:16, the *assembly of elders (presbiterion)* gathered together. Of what people did this assembly consist? _____⁴⁴

In Acts 22:5, who possessed the judicial authority to send Saul of Tarsus to Damascus? _____⁴⁵

In the New Testament church, who had authority to ordain? 1Tim.4:14
_____⁴⁶

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.

Lesson: 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

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Sacramental functions

Did elders participate in offering the sacrifices? If so, under what authority? Lev. 4:13-17

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What implications does this have in the New Testament church?

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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

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New Testament application

Does the Old Testament concept of priests as ministers, carry over to New Testament gospel preachers? Rom.15:16 Yes or no?

51

To what does Paul compare himself in this text?

52

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 1Tim.4:6 and what were his duties toward the congregation? _____⁵³

What did Paul send Titus to do in Titus 1:5? Does this imply he was a pastor? _____⁵⁴

What was the relationship of these men to other elders in the church? _____⁵⁵

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.

Lesson: Ordination

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 _____⁵⁶
just as Aaron was. Heb. 5:4*

Acts 13:1-3: Paul and Barnabas

From who did the call to ministry come?

_____⁵⁷

To whom did the Holy Spirit speak about that call?

_____⁵⁸

Who set Paul and Barnabas apart for the ministry and how?

_____⁵⁹

What would be a first indication to an individual that he may be called to the office of elder, according to 1Tim.3:1? _____⁶⁰

What is a key quality for calling to ministry in 1Tim.1:12?

_____⁶¹

The character: 1Timothy 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. 1Tim. 3:10.

If a person has the character qualities in this chapter, does this automatically qualify him to be ordained? _____⁶²

Discussion question: According to 1Tim.3:6, what is likely to happen if a new convert is ordained to the office of elder? _____⁶³

The competence

Some think that the character qualities in 1Tim.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?
_____⁶⁴

According to Titus 1:9, what must an elder able to do? _____⁶⁵

According to 2Cor.3:4-6, from where does our competence come?
_____⁶⁶

Discussion: Have we found in 1Tim.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?
_____⁶⁷

Who ordains?

In 1Tim.4:14, who laid hands on Timothy for ordination? _____⁶⁸

What is the Greek word used here for the group that laid on hands?
_____⁶⁹

Who *set apart* Paul and Barnabas and by what authority?
_____⁷⁰

How is ordination done?

In Acts 13:1-3, what two actions accompanied the ordination of Paul and Barnabas? _____⁷¹

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.⁷²

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?⁷³

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.

Lesson: 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*.

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. Without this, egalitarianism has no foundation.

In this study, we will see the apostles were well aware of cultural considerations but ignored them in favor of issues going back to creation before cultures existed.

Does the headship of the man in the household extend to the church?

Both sides of the question concede that the husband is the head of the wife because this is plainly taught in scripture.⁷⁴ However, egalitarians insist the home and the church are separate institutions and therefore the headship of the man in the home is not an issue in ecclesiology. Complimentarians insist the two institutions are different but not separate and therefore male leadership also extends to the church.

1Tim.2:11-15

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 that Paul does not permit women to do in the church? _____⁷⁵

What is the first reason Paul gives for this prohibition? _____⁷⁶

What is the second reason for this prohibition? _____⁷⁷

Discuss what is meant by *saved through childbearing* in verse 15. ⁷⁸

From these verses, what can we deduce about the relationship between the home and the church? Are they completely separate institutions or not? _____⁷⁹

1Cor.11:1-16

Egalitarians sometimes argue that both men and women are the image of God and therefore have the same value. On the grounds of equal value, they say the woman must also be entitled to the same authority in the church. Apparently some Corinthians held this view. In the following verses, we will see how Paul deals with this.

What is the original creation hierarchy in V.3? _____⁸⁰

What is the man called in V.7? _____⁸¹

What is the woman called in V.7? _____⁸²

Is there a difference between the image of God in man and the image of God in woman? See V.8 _____⁸³ If so, how does this reflect on the question of authority? _____⁸⁴

How does the order of events in creation reflect on the question of authority? See V.9 _____⁸⁵

Does a man's authority in the church or home imply he is independent of woman? See V.11-12 _____⁸⁶

From this lesson we learn...

- The authority of the husband over the wife in Genesis extends also to male authority in the church. The reasons are:
 - Though the home and the church are different institutions, they

are not separate.

- Man is the glory of God, whereas woman is the glory of man.
- Creation order. Woman was derived from man, whereas man was created directly by God.
- Creation purpose. Woman was made to be man's helper.
- The question of whether or not women may be ordained is a creation issue, not a cultural one.
- Though the man is in authority over the woman in both the home and church, this does not make him independent of woman.
- Putting women in authority in the church, may subject them to the same temptation to deception that Eve faced in garden. The apostolic prohibition against a woman teaching in the church or exercising authority over men is intended to be protective, not discriminatory.

Lesson: Important elements about elders

Plurality of elders

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:

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

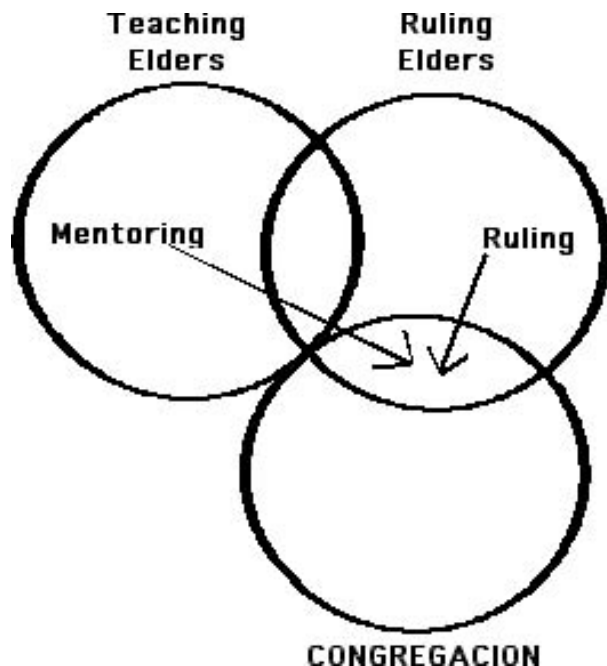
Bishops and elders

Are the terms *bishop* and *elder* interchangeable? See Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-7; Phil.1:1 _____⁸⁷

According to Acts 20:28, what is a function in common with all elders?
_____⁸⁸

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. 1Tim. 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. (1Cor.9)

Functions of all church leaders

According Eph.4:11-12, what are the spiritual leaders supposed to be doing?

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According to 2Tim.4:1, what is a primary product of a Christian leader?

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The rights of elders

What is due to elders in 1Tim.5:17? _____ 91

What is due to elders in 1Tim.5:19? _____ 92

What is due to elders in 1Thess.5:13? _____ 93

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.

Elementos del Libro de Orden

(A ser discutido si el tiempo permite)

- La Constitución de la Iglesia
- Las Cortes
- Misión vs Iglesia Organizada
- Comité vs comisión
- Autoridad para predicar y administrar sacramentos
- Apelación en casos disciplinario

The Church

How do we differ from other evangelicals and Catholics in our concept of the church?

The term *church* in the New Testament translates the word *ekklesia* which means, *assembly* or *congregation*.⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵ Because of the ambiguities, it is better to build our ecclesiology on the totality of scripture.

What is the mission?

The Great Commission is the mission, the church is the method. Mt.28:19-20. Tragically many movements, especially liberals, have tried to add to the church's mission, thus distracting from the gospel.⁹⁶

"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."⁹⁷

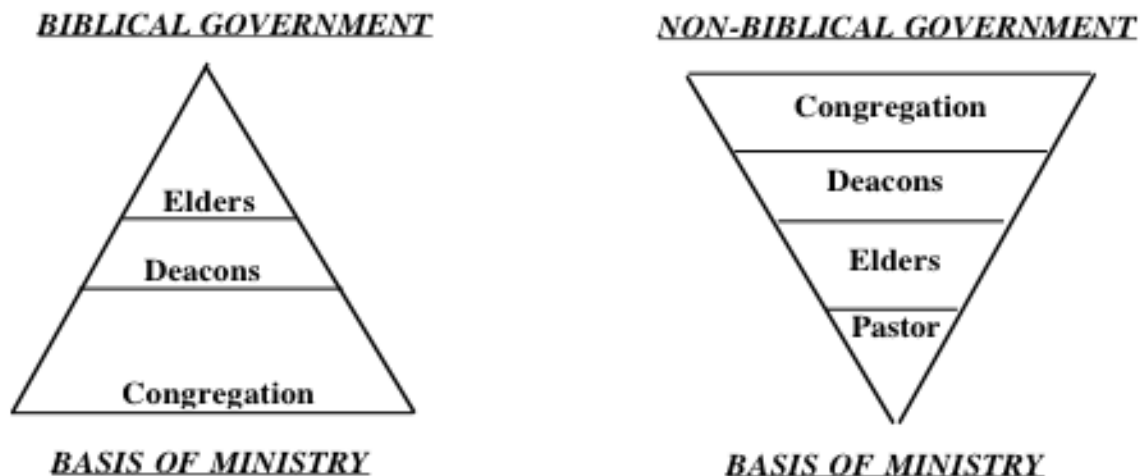
Feeding the poor is not the mission of the church. Social justice is not the mission of the church. These things may be necessary to do but leaders must never allow them to detract from the mission of making disciples.

According to the Great Commission in Mt.28:19-29, what is the one mission of the church? _____⁹⁸

According to the Great Commission, what is the method for doing the mission? _____⁹⁹

According to Eph.4:11-12 how is the church to implement its mission?
_____¹⁰⁰

The inverted church



In biblical theology, the congregation does the work of the ministry under the supervision of the leaders. The leaders therefore are primarily trainers.

Discussion: Is your church inverted?

The marks of a true church

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.

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

- The faithful preaching of the word of God.
- The faithful administration of the sacraments.
- Church discipline.

What does Gal.1:8-10 say about the preaching of a biblical gospel?

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Discussion: In Mt.28 we find the command of Christ to baptize those who become disciples. If a church fails to baptize disciples, what can we conclude is their attitude toward the mission of the church? If a church fails to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ in the Lord's Supper, what can we conclude about its attitude toward Christ's sacrifice?

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Is membership biblical?

See Smalling's article on this and discuss.

Is the local church autonomous?

Some groups believe in a doctrine called *the autonomy of the local church*. This doctrine states the local church has within it everything it needs for its own government and need not account to any other ecclesiastical entity.

Discussion: On the grounds of Acts 16:4, discuss whether this doctrine is valid.

When is it appropriate to leave a church?

According to 2Cor.6:16-18, when is it appropriate to leave a church?

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According to Gal.1:8-10 when is it appropriate to leave a church?

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According to 1 Cor.5, when is it appropriate to leave a church?

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From this lesson we learn...

- The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.
- The method is preaching and teaching the word of God.
- The role of the leaders is to train the congregation to do the work for the ministry.
- A church may be considered biblical if it preaches the biblical gospel, administers the sacraments and practices discipline.
- It is appropriate to leave a church when it practices idolatry, worships a false God, fails to preach the gospel or practice biblical discipline.
- Membership lists are biblical.

Church discipline

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

The purpose of discipline

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

1Cor.5

Discussion: When is tolerance a virtue and when is it sin, according to verses 1-2? _____¹⁰⁶

What are the sins in this chapter that define a person as non-Christian?

What must a church do that has these practices going on in the church, according to verses 6-8? _____¹⁰⁷

According to Rev.2:18-24, what is a church risking if it neglects discipline?
_____¹⁰⁸

Who in the church is responsible for disciplinary procedures? Acts 20:28-30; Gal.6:1; 1Tim.5:19-21 _____¹⁰⁹

The three censures

- Admonition
- Suspension
- Excommunication

Which of the three censures is found in 2Tim.4:2? _____¹¹⁰

Which of the three censures is found in 1Cor.5:13. _____¹¹¹

Which of the three censures is found in 1Cor.5:11? _____¹¹²

Discussion: Procedure against an elder: 1Tim.5:19-20

According to these verses, upon whom is the burden of proof?
_____¹¹³

What must the accused elder prove? _____¹¹⁴

If an accused elder is not found guilty, what is the procedure regarding the accusers? _____¹¹⁵

A serious case

Acts 20:28-30; Rom.16:17-18; Titus 3:10

Discussion: 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?
_____¹¹⁶

Discussion: When does Mt. 18:15-18 apply?

From this lesson we learn...

- Church discipline is corrective, not punitive. It is for the honor of God, the purity of the church and the restoration of offenders.
- Discipline of divisive or heretical persons must be attended to promptly and with diligence to prevent serious damage to the church.
- The three steps of discipline are admonition, suspension and excommunication.
- Accusations against an elder must be accompanied with two or three witnesses. All burden of proof is on the accuser.

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 The Law of Moses. The point: Support of the New Testament minister is the fulfillment of an Old Testament command.

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⁵ 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.

⁶ Seed sown for a harvest.

⁷ Material benefits from his spiritual labors.

⁸ It is wages earned, not charity. Ministers of the gospel must not be regarded as objects of charity.

⁹ From the temple service by the priests.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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>

¹³ Elders of Israel.

¹⁴ To all the "people" as represented by the elders.

¹⁵ The promise was to bring the people out of Egypt. It was made to all the people via the elders as their representative. This shows how the concept of representation by elders was taken for granted from the earliest times.

¹⁶ All the elders of the people

¹⁷ Moses and Aaron

¹⁸ All the people as represented by the elders who were the ones present who saw the signs.

¹⁹ Moses as the prophet-priest represented God. The elders represented the people.

²⁰ Elders

²¹ People

²² The men of Israel. Note it was the elders present, not every man in Israel.

²³ The full-time ministers in the Old Testament, prophets and priests, represented God to the people. The elders represented the people to God.

²⁴ Yes. Both to act as judges and executioners of a sentence.

²⁵ First to the priests and then to the elders.

²⁶ Yes, under the authority of the priests.

²⁷ Elders of the people

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Lexicon Thayer. 1979, Lafayette, Indiana. Same word used in 2Cor.8:19 for Titus being appointed by the churches to assist Paul in administering a famine relief offering in Jerusalem.

³⁰ 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.

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- ³¹ Prayer and fasting. This denotes the seriousness of ordination.
- ³² 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.
- ³³ To be overseers of the "flock," the congregation, and to care for them.
- ³⁴ 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.
- ³⁵ 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.
- ³⁶ Yes. They must distinguish between wolves and sheep.
- ³⁷ Ruling
- ³⁸ Those who rule primarily and those who teach primarily.
- ³⁹ Yes. Both may administrate at times and both may teach at times.
- ⁴⁰ Preaching and teaching.
- ⁴¹ Muzzling an ox is an illustration of the injustice of depriving the minister of adequate support.
- ⁴² He is quoting Jesus, who in turn is reflecting a principle in the Law of Moses.
- ⁴³ Two or three witnesses. Paul takes his cue from this judicial requirement in the Mosaic Law.
- ⁴⁴ The priests and scribes, i.e., both classes of leaders.
- ⁴⁵ The high priest and the assembly of elders, i.e., the Jewish Presbytery.
- ⁴⁶ The council of elders, i.e., Presbytery.
- ⁴⁷ To both, but to the priests first, since their job was to expound the law to the people and preserve it.
- ⁴⁸ 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.
- ⁴⁹ 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.
- ⁵⁰ Similar texts are 2Chr. 13:10; Is. 61:6; Joel 1:9,13; Heb. 10:11
- ⁵¹ Yes
- ⁵² 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*.
- ⁵³ In some translations, it is *servant*, which is equivalent to *minister*. His duties were to teach the whole church. If Eph.4:12, *pastor-teacher* is a pastoral office, then Timothy was a pastor.
- ⁵⁴ Set the church in order and ordain elders. What other office could this be but an organizing pastor?
- ⁵⁵ They had the authority to ordain elders, including evaluate who was qualified. This alone shows a distinction.
- ⁵⁶ Called by God.
- ⁵⁷ The Holy Spirit
- ⁵⁸ The other leaders.
- ⁵⁹ The leaders by prayer and fasting and laying on of hands.
- ⁶⁰ Desire for it, assuming the motivation is to serve.
- ⁶¹ Faithfulness

-
- ⁶² 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.
- ⁶³ He will fall into pride.
- ⁶⁴ Able to teach
- ⁶⁵ 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.
- ⁶⁶ From God. Nevertheless, this competency must be demonstrated before ordination.
- ⁶⁷ The congregation chose the deacons and the apostles laid hands on them, thus ordaining them.
- ⁶⁸ The Presbytery, the council of elders.
- ⁶⁹ *Presbyterion*: Council of elders, from which we derive the word "presbytery."
- ⁷⁰ The body of spiritual leaders set them apart by the command of the Holy Spirit. The act of setting apart was done by laying on of hands after prayer and fasting. This seems to be the pattern throughout the Bible.
- ⁷¹ Prayer and fasting; laying on of hands.
- ⁷² Exodus 29
- ⁷³ 1Cor.11:29
- ⁷⁴ Eph.5:22-23
- ⁷⁵ Teach, exercise authority over men
- ⁷⁶ The man was created first and therefore has priority in authority.
- ⁷⁷ Eve was deceived. This implies the vulnerability of the woman to deception.
- ⁷⁸ Childbearing has neither saving value nor a moral obligation on all women to have children. He simply means the business of women is husbands and children. If the church puts them into roles for which they were not created, we subject them to pressures they were not designed to handle. It is the man's job to deal with snakes in the garden.
- ⁷⁹ They are different institutions but not separate. The apostolic mindset blends the two.
- ⁸⁰ God, Christ, man, woman in that order. Paul is implying that putting women in authority in the church would be an aberration like putting the church in authority over Christ or Christ in authority over God.
- ⁸¹ Image and glory of God.
- ⁸² The glory of man.
- ⁸³ The difference is not in the value or nature of the image itself but in the order by which it was derived. The man's image was first, derived directly from God. The woman's image followed, derived indirectly through man.
- ⁸⁴ Any authority the woman may exercise must therefore be through the man. This in itself establishes the question of relative authority in the home and the church.
- ⁸⁵ If the woman was made to help the man in his work, then by the nature of the case, she will not be in authority over him.
- ⁸⁶ No, they are interdependent. Men must beware of arrogance in this regard.
- ⁸⁷ 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*.
- ⁸⁸ 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.
- ⁸⁹ Equipping the Christians so that these can do the work of the ministry. That is, church leaders are to be trainers for others.
- ⁹⁰ Other leaders.
- ⁹¹ Honor
- ⁹² Protection from accusations without adequate evidence.

⁹³ Respect and esteem.

⁹⁴ Lexicon, Louw and Nida. "Though some persons have tried to see in the term ἐκκλησία a more or less literal meaning of 'called-out ones,' this type of etymologizing is not warranted either by the meaning of ἐκκλησία in NT times or even by its earlier usage. The term ἐκκλησία was in common usage for several hundred years before the Christian era and was used to refer to an assembly of persons constituted by well-defined membership. In general Greek usage it was normally a socio-political entity based upon citizenship in a city-state (see ἐκκλησία, 11.78) and in this sense is parallel to δῆμος (11.78). For the NT, however, it is important to understand the meaning of ἐκκλησία as 'an assembly of God's people.'"

⁹⁵ 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.

⁹⁶ The social gospel is one of these.

⁹⁷ Schweitzer, William, Ph.D. A church planter in England with the Presbyterian Church in America. From an article, on the Aquila Report, June, 2010.

⁹⁸ Making disciples. Anything other than this is not the mission of the church.

⁹⁹ Teaching and preaching.

¹⁰⁰ By training its members in ministry.

¹⁰¹ Any church that does not preach the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, is cursed of God and must not be viewed as Christian.

¹⁰² Disregarding baptism, implies that disciple making is unimportant, though that is the mission of the church. Disregarding the Lord's Supper implies disregarding the nature of the sacrifice it represents.

¹⁰³ When it practices idolatry or worships a false god.

¹⁰⁴ When it preaches a false gospel.

¹⁰⁵ When discipline is not practiced and the church is indistinguishable from the world.

¹⁰⁶ Paul considers their tolerance to be sinful and based on arrogance rather than humility. We tolerate repentant sinners. We do not tolerate sin.

¹⁰⁷ It must correct the sinning believer or excommunicate him.

¹⁰⁸ Judgment from God on the church.

¹⁰⁹ The ordained elders

¹¹⁰ Admonition

¹¹¹ Excommunication

¹¹² Suspension of fellowship, which by the nature of the case must include suspension from the Lord's supper.

¹¹³ The burden of proof is on the accuser.

¹¹⁴ Nothing whatsoever. He is innocent until proven guilty.

¹¹⁵ Public rebuke for false accusations.

¹¹⁶ Divisive and heretical people must be dealt with promptly and firmly.