

James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*
Vol. I Part 1, ch. 2; Part 2, ch. 1, 3,4,5
 Shepherd Leader Training, Feb. 14, 2015

Christianity is nonsensical without the church, from Bannerman's Introduction - "The society of Christians is . . . not an accidental or voluntary union which has grown up of itself: it is a **union designed beforehand**, appointed from the beginning by God, and plainly contemplated and required in every page of the NT. There are **precepts** in the Bible addressed, not to believers separately, but to believers associated together into a **corporate society**; there are **duties** that are enjoined upon the **body**, and not upon the members of which it is composed; there are **powers** assigned to the **community**, to which the individuals of the community are strangers; there is a government, an order, a code of laws, a system of ordinances and officers described in Scripture, which can apply to none other than a **collective association** of Christians. Without the existence of a Church, or of a body of believers, as contradistinguished from believers individually, very much of what is contained in the Bible would be **unintelligible, and without practical application.**" - 2

A. The Church a Divine and Spiritual Institution - Vol. 1, Part 1, chapter 2

1. Divine Institution - by Christ's appointment

1. Every believer is joined by faith to one another, by virtue of the faith itself - "In becoming one with Christ, he becomes at the same time, in a certain sense, one with all who are Christ's."
2. Public profession is not one of choice, but of obligation and command from God - very entrance into life is through a public testimony
3. "A solitary Christian is seen to be a contradiction in terms."
4. **Contrary to** seeing the Church merely as voluntary and humanly devised, there is a "positive institution of a society by Christ Himself"
 1. This is the foundation of much of what follows.

Group Discussion (GD): What possible arguments do you imagine against this view, both biblically and personally?

2. Spiritual Institution - of the Holy Spirit

1. The Spirit works upon the soul, **through the outward uses of the word, water, Lord's Supper, which are only "sensible signs themselves", but the avenue the Spirit uses** - there is no power in the outward signs themselves
 1. Difference between **agent** of grace (Spirit) and **means** of grace (Word, Sacraments, Prayer, Community)
 2. Guards freedom of conscience and the civil liberty of the State

B. Part 2: Chapters 1: “The Source of Church Power,” 3: “The Nature and Character of Church Power,” 4: “The Extent and Limits of Church Power,” 5: “The End and Design of Church Power”

1. “The Source of Church Power”

1. Must be some sort of authority or power with any type of community; and must, be definition, include office-bearers and laws - without which, there is no society.

2. From where does this authority derive power?

1. **Delegated (from within)** - Private, voluntary and self-regulated societies, whose power is derived from the consent and appointment of the members. The Church includes this, but is more than this.
2. **Appointed, from the state (from without)** - i.e., judges appointed by the office-bearers
3. **Christ - directly from God by “positive” institution**, yet also including voluntary submission of human members. Why?
 1. Christ commands his members to associate corporately
 2. Christ appoints office-bearers for after His ascension, and providing for their succession
 3. Christ enacts laws for the conduct of the members and office-bearers
 4. Precepts and promises to officers as rulers, not just teachers
 5. Duties of submissions to the office-bearers by the members
 6. Examples of power, “not of advice merely”, such as the “keys of the kingdom of heaven”

3. “The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church”

1. **Both founder AND administrator**, not just one or the other - “All is derived from Him; and all emanates from Him as its source. . . If doctrine is taught, it is taught because He has revealed it; if ordinances are administered, they are administered in His name, and because they are His; if government is established and exercised, it is through His appointment and authority; if saving grace is dispensed, it is dispensed through the virtue and power of His Spirit; if a blessing is communicated, it is because He blesses” (195).
2. **Not in the Church itself** - “it is not the Church that governs and dispenses ordinances and spiritual graces in His name, and by reason of His original gift and endowment to her, but Christ who, **personally present**, governs and administers ordinances and blessing through the Church. The Church has no store of life apart from Christ being in it” (199).
3. **Detractors from this:**
 1. Erastians - State has certain prerogatives within the Church, impinging on Christ’s leadership, even if the political magistrate is Christian
 2. Roman Catholics - Pope claims authority reserved for Christ himself, and the Church usurps Christ’s mediatorial office itself, as if it could be divorced from His person
 3. “High Churchmen” - power in the Church itself, apart from Christ or the recipient’s union with Christ

GD: There are many fears with regard to Church Power - which fears are dispelled by the source being Christ? What fears remain?

3. “The Nature of Church Power”

1. Two Sorts of Authority under God’s Reign:

1. **The State** - ordained by God, with authority over temporal conditions of all men
2. **The Church** - ordained by God, with authority over inward conditions, exercising Christ’s authority as Lord of the conscience
3. See Matt. 20:20-8; 22:16-21; John 18:36-37 for the distinction between civil and spiritual authority. It is not that these two necessarily conflict, but that they are simply different, over separate realms. If they inherently conflicted, God could not have ordained them both!

2. Spiritual Authority of the Church consists of three things:

1. **Dogmatike - Dogmas [Word]**, or articles of faith - revealed in the Word, the Church is a “divinely appointed witness for God’s truth” to those outside the Church, and a witness and teacher to those within
 1. Anything but a spiritual authority is inconsistent with the goal, which is to bring men to faith and obedience - “a compulsory power can never secure my belief”
2. **Diataktike - Ordinances and Government [Sacraments]** - administrative and declaratory power, as channels through which the Spirit works
 1. No physical influence, or temporal or coercive power, can be used
3. **Diacretik - Discipline** - admission to and exclusion from the fellowship of the Church
 1. Confirm in their faith and obedience; or convict of sin and recover them by admonition, warning, censure, rebuke or excommunication

GD: When and how do you experience each aspect of the church’s power throughout your regular week?

4. “The Extent and Limits of Church Power”

1. **Problems to avoid:** 1. *Overrate* - extending it beyond the bounds of Scripture; 2. *Underrate* - church power becomes merely human appointment and advice, not authority
2. **Extent:** submit to Church power insofar as it is in agreement with the Word of God AND, in a subordinate sense, because it is emitted by the Church, which is itself instituted by God in His Word - lest there be no power that is binding *except for what the members otherwise consent to*. **Authority, by definition, cannot be limited by consent.**
 1. Church power is more and better than just a human power that is in agreement with the Word, which is **advice, not authority**
 2. If the Church is more than just a voluntary, humanly-appointed institution, than it must possess power outside of human consent; otherwise, there would be “laws without authority, ordinances without grace, and discipline without

judgment” (239). Compare the judgment of a civil law court, which is pronounced and carried out regardless of the consent of those it applies to.

3. If power is only so far as consent goes, then the majority, in effect, becomes the office-bearers, since the minority must obey the will of the majority.

1. The danger of “personal collisions” looms large here, whereas in a Presbyterian case, the personal aspects can be extracted when a case is brought to a higher court (244).
2. The “bishops”, “presbyters”, “rulers” and “pastors” are throughout Scripture NOT bound by the consent of the community
3. “Reprove” and “rebuke” do NOT admit of being limited by the consent of those receiving it, although one would do the best to persuade
4. Obeying your elders, submitting to them, does NOT admit of such limits
5. See Heb. 13.17; Luke 2.51; Rom. 13.1,5; 1Cor. 16.16; 1Cor. 5

GD: Do you tend to overrate or underrate Church authority? How does the nature of authority itself change the way you experience Word, Sacrament and Discipline?

3. Limits:

1. **Spiritual** - excluding temporal or civil authority, like legal punishments or fines; as well as sacramental “charms”
2. **By Christ, the Head:**
 1. **The laws are declaratory**, NOT enacting - meaning they merely explain, apply and declare the laws that Christ has already revealed. The Word of God alone has powers of legislation, enacting laws.
 2. **The powers are ministerial and subordinate** - office-bearers are merely servants with authority *derived* from Christ, carrying out the will of Christ, not their own. They may pronounce judgments based on the precedents in the Word of God, rather than starting their own precedents. [from Ch. 2, pp. 218-221]
3. **By the Word of God** - forbidding any *addition or subtraction*
4. **By the rights, privileges, and liberty of the Christian people** - freedom of conscience

GD: Considering how the limits are meant to be gracious, how can you imagine them being extended beyond in the life of the church? Have you ever experienced such a violation?

5. The End and Design of Church Power - Its Purpose

1. **To the Church, directly; to the world, indirectly** (Cf. 1Cor. 5.11-13 - where church power is instructed to exclude from its fellowship an unrepentant sinner; but not to impose any restrictions with those in the world outside the church)
2. This does not diminish its mission, but limits its role as an office with power
3. No authority over those outside the Church, in the world, other than to witness for God
4. For the edification, not the destruction, of the whole body