

We have already discovered the “church” as an *essential* element of the gospel related to the means of grace that is mediated through the ministry of *word* and *sacrament* (Christ mediated as prophet and priest). But what about church government (Christ as *king*)? Do you think people associate “government” with “good news?” Why? Why Not?

In relation to the application of church government in the church, notice carefully the way scripture instructs us concerning church government, both as related to those who receive it and those who administer it, as to render it “good news.” For instance:

- 1 Peter 5:1-5
  - How does Peter describe church government- as doing what exactly?
  - Notice the “not’s” and the corresponding exhortations to those who are “elders.”
  - Notice also the exhortation to those who are the recipients of church government
  - How then would government in the spirit of 1 Peter 5 be “good news”?
- Hebrews 13:7-17
  - Notice carefully how vs. 7 and vs. 17 are both directed to the recipients of church government even as to begin and end unified argument?
  - So what is the point of vs. 8-16 in relation to 7 and 17 do you think?
  - How then does vs. 8-16 explain the conclusion in vs. 17,
  - What do you think is the relation between the exhortation in vs. 7, and then the context of vs. 8-16? What are the dangers to the gospel that are in view here and that require church government?

Summary: If we really do believe that legalism/moralism is a danger to our faith, and that we are all prone to it as per the above, isn’t it good news that God has appointed undershepherds to hold us to the truth and grace of the gospel? And if part of the gospel is to set us free from sins, even as all sins are to our harm, and the harm of those we love, isn’t it good news that God has appointed a government that helps us not to sin? In other words, if we really do believe in the gospel, why would we be against God mediating his rule over our lives in order to help us to experience the gospel? This is the essence of the Biblical perspective on what is “good news” about church government. We should now consider the “divine institution” of church government, lest we think it is but a human invention.

Read WCF 30.1-2. Notice as well how this is stated in the preface of the PCA Book of Church Order.

*Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests (Isaiah 9:6)... having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father (Matt.28:18)... (as) Head over all things to the Church, which is His body; the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:20-23); He being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints.(Eph.4:10-12)*

*It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thus **mediately** exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.*

Notes:

- Notice especially the above reference to Eph.1 and 4 as again related to the mediated presence of Christ in the NT temple context, here applied to his rule as mediated through the church offices.
- Notice then the language of “mediately” as applied to Christ’s presence

Just as the early two passages “assume” the divine *appointment* or “institution” of ecclesiastical “rulers” (what is historically referred to as *Jure-divino* ecclesiology or rule “by Divine law/institution”), we should also consider the NT teaching in Mt. 16: 18-19 (esp. as compared with Mt. 18:17ff and Christ’s teaching of God’s presence in, with and through the exercise of “binding and loosing” in the context of a church court) c.f. John 20:22-23.

Notes:

- There is a relationship to what is happening in heaven to what is happening “visibly” on earth, akin to the logic of Ephesians. E.g. Christ’s ascended ministry of rule acting through visible rulers who are given the “keys of the kingdom of God” such as to “bind and loose.”

- Compared to Mt. 18, what is the meaning of “bind and loose” and how is this related to the meaning of “keys?” What are the implications of this in relation to the Lord’s Supper, membership, discipline, etc.

The concept of “keys,” is derived from the Old Testament (1 Chron. 9:17–27, Nehemiah 7:1ff) and related to the Temple “gatekeepers” as having the duty of employing keys to open it every morning. The gatekeepers were literally to “guard” (Neh. 7:3ff) the entrance into the Temple. The important thing here is that this image of “keys” is expanded in Isaiah 22:20–22 to foreshadowing the ministry of the Messiah. Christ’s point in Mt. 16 is to affirm this messianic role albeit mediated through the messianic assembly built upon the foundation of the apostles, the NT temple of God! In the exercise of the “keys”, the gatekeepers (church officers) are charged with governing (opening and shutting) ones visible relationship with the kingdom of God—even as this forms the basis of church government and the meaning of “watch over the flock of God” (I Peter 5). Thus, the language of “binding and loosing” is an ancient Near Eastern way of describing the authority to exercise government. For instance, the word “bind” is used to describe the exercise of government in bringing someone under justice or a sentence of some sort, to be legally restrained; e.g., Herod's arrest of John is referred to as “binding” (Mt. 14:3) and so too the arrest of Jesus (Mt. 27:2). To “bind” someone is to put him under a sentence, thus restraining him. So also, the term “loose” is used when the sentence is pardoned or when someone is restored in a right relation to the governed community. That this language speaks of the exercise of government is clearly evidenced in Mt. 18:15–18. In this passage, the point is in reference to the exercise of government in the Temple context (see context—e.g. not a vague “whenever anyone Christian’s meet” but when the church, acting through its appointed rulers, meets to form judgment!). His point is that God is present (in the midst) in such exercise of government to affect a person’s relationship with the covenant community, then the Temple community. Therefore, concerning Mt. 16, John Calvin observed:

*But the church binds him whom it excommunicates—not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him whom it receives into communion for it makes him a sharer of the unity which it has in Christ Jesus.”*

Read then WCF 30.3-4.

- What is the purpose of Church discipline. (C.f. “Church Discipline” handout)
- Along these lines, we should consider then 1Cor 5—if the church (acting through its government) can “ex-communicate” or “demit” someone from church membership as expressed at the Lord’s table, can a person “admit” themselves as to remain outside the church government that mediates Christ’s presence vis-à-vis Mt. 16? Again, we should remember what is good news about this as noted earlier.

Read WCF 31.1-3

- Notice that the institution of church government is not new to the NT, but has always been present in redemptive history, albeit under various administrations. (c.f. *A Priest with No Name* by Preston Graham for a more extensive review of R/H and Priestly vs. Ruling offices distinguished)
- Notice again that while church government has always been present, albeit in different administrations throughout redemptive history, it has always reflected what could at the least be described as a “two-office” expression. E.g. the office of “teaching/priestly elder” and “ruling elder--” the latter as chosen from “among the people.” Exodus 18:13ff, (c.f. 2Chron.19:89)  
By way of a comparison and contrast, the lay-elders focused upon the governing aspects and grew naturally out of the patriarchic family system and continued through the Mosaic period even into the exile. This office was set apart in its “uniquely representative” nature as a lay-office and was therefore “selected by the people and speaking and acting on their behalf.”<sup>1</sup> The lay-elder office was “regarded

<sup>1</sup> C.f. Ex. 17:5-6, 19:7, 24:1-11, Lev. 4:13-15, Dt.21:1-9, 1Sam.8:43, 2Sam5:3, 1Kgs 20:7-8.

by the principle of representation as the whole congregation of Israel.<sup>2</sup> There was “no evidence that the ministry of Word or the teaching of the law was ever assigned to this office or that the ability to teach had any bearing on qualifications for it,”<sup>3</sup>

Compare then to Dt. 33:9-10 as describing the office of pastor-priest. The pastor-priests (out of the tribe of Levi) shared with the elders the responsibilities of judgment and rule with special responsibilities for difficult cases which required their expertise in the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup> And yet, these responsibilities were adjunct to their primary calling as ministers of the word and sacrament and as the superintendents of Israel’s worship.<sup>5</sup> As per the unique role of mediating between God and humanity, the priests were *not* chosen from among the family system per se, but were set apart by God from the tribe of Levi. They were of a “separate and distinct membership” and therefore “did not share the characteristically representative character of the eldership... the priesthood was organized according to a set of regulations which pertained to itself alone.” They were in short claimed by God as his own ministers in Israel and were granted a direct ministerial authority not assigned to elders.<sup>6</sup>

- This “two-elder” expression is interestingly reflected in the NT context as well- c.f. 1 Tim 3 in relation to 1 Tim 5:17

Note: There is some difference of opinion within the reformed tradition about whether the “deacon” in 1Tim. 3:11 is a “servant elder” as contrasted with the “bishop elder” as then to correspond to the two types of elders in 1 Tim. 5:17, or if 1 Tim. 5:17 is describing two types of “elders” as related to the office described in 1 Tim. 3:1-10 as distinguished from a third office of “deacon” in 1Tim.3:11. (Note as well, this would effect what you see happening in Acts 7—the appointment of “elder deacons” or “deacons as distinguished from elders). The important thing is to see the distinction that was also in the NT context between pastor-elders and ruling elders as corresponding to the office of “Preist/Elder” and “Governing Elders” as noted already.

Notice again WCF 31.1. This is taken from the record in Acts 15 regarding the council that met at Jerusalem. In asserting the propriety of such meetings, our form of government is different from another form of church government. The form of church government which denies the propriety of such assemblies is called what?

Local Courts: (Session)

1 Cor. 5:11-13

Higher Courts: (Presbytery and Assembly)

Acts 15: 1-6

Acts 16:4

Concerning then this “two-office” form of government (however one affirms the possible third office of deacon as per the PCA), it is important to distinguish between their “several” actions and their “joint” actions (c.f. Acts 15 in “session”) such as to pertain to spiritual influence/power (several actions) vs. jurisdictional authority (joint actions in session).

According to the Westminster Assembly, what three things “belongeth to” synods and councils to do? (section 2)

What are three common forms of government?

1. Prelacy: administered by archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons and other ecclesiastical offices on a hierarchical system by hierarchical appointment vs. representative or congregational determined offices. All things are general.(Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Methodist)

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<sup>2</sup> C.f. Ex.12:3, 6, 21, 1Kgs 8:1, 2, 3, 5, 14, 22, 55, 62, 65. For instance, these lay-elders were seen requesting a king on behalf of the people in 1Sam.8:4, and acting on behalf of Israel in covenant making in 2 Sam.5:3, Ex.24:1ff.

<sup>3</sup> c.f. Ezek. 7:26, Jer. 18:18.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Dt.17:8-13, 21:5, 1Chron.23:4.

<sup>5</sup> Rayburn, p. 225-226. cf. Lev. 1:5ff, Ezek. 7:26, Ezra 7:10-11, Neh.8:7-9, 15:11ff, 1Chron 15:11ff, 16:4ff.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Num.3:5-13, Num.6:22-27, Dt. 18:2, 5.

James Bannerman:

The Proper and essential distinction between the two systems is the assertion by Episcopalians and the denial by Presbyterians of Scriptural warrant for a third order of ordinary and permanent office-bearers in the Church above presbyters and deacons, having exclusively in their hands the "power of ordination" and the "power of jurisdiction." (Vol.2, p.263-4)

In other words, the difference asserted by the Episcopalian theory between the order of bishops and the order of presbyters is exhibited in the right belonging to bishops, and not to presbyters, of ordaining to office in the Church and further, in the power of appertaining to bishops and not to presbyters, of exercising government and administering discipline in the Christian society.

2. Independency: Each separate congregation is under Christ subject to no external jurisdiction. All things are local.

Congregational Independency (Baptist, Congregationalism)

Representative Independency (Reformed Baptist)

3. Presbyterianism: Representative government that enjoy jurisdictional/ecclesiastical connectedness to other churches within same denomination. Some things are originally local; some are general. Even originally local matters may become general, through review, complaint, or appeal.

Before the Assembly mentions submission to the decisions of church councils, it qualifies this submission in an important way (see section 2). What is this qualification?

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**Addendum: Discipline Further Defined and Explained**

**BCO 27.1ff**

*Discipline is the exercise of authority given the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare. The term has two senses: the one referring to the whole government, inspection, training, guardianship and control which the Church maintains over its members, its officers and its courts; the other a restricted and technical sense, signifying judicial process.*

**I. Argument for Divine appointment of Church Discipline from Scripture:**

1. Direct institution of Church discipline and ecclesiastical censures by Christ Himself:

Matt.16:18ff

Heidelberg Catechism # 83:

What is the office of the Keys?

*The preaching of the holy gospel and Church discipline; by which two things the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut against unbelievers.*

Matt.18:15-18

Heidelberg Catechism # 85:

How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Church discipline?

*In this way; that, according to the command of Christ, if an under the Christian name show themselves unsound either in doctrine or life, and oafter repeated brotherly admonition refuse to turn from their errors or evil ways, they are complained of to the Church or to its proper officers, and if they neglect to hear them also, are by them excluded from the holy Sacraments and the Christian communion and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ; and if they promise and show real amendment, they are again received as members of Christ and his Church.*

John 20:21-23

2. Apostolic practice as foundation : (Eph.2:20)

1 Cor.4:18-21; 5:1-13

2 Cor. 2:1-10; 7:8-12; 10:2-8; 13:2-10

1 Tim..1:19-20

3. Directions given in Scripture for the manner of its exercise:

1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim.2:24-26

Jude 23

Tit. 3:10; 2 Thess.6-14ff

4. Directions given in Scripture for the manner of its reception:

Hebrews 13:17ff

Romans 13:1-4

1 Peter 5:5

**III. Three Goals of Discipline:**

1. Glory of God (and honor of religion)

1 Cor.6:20

Eph. 3:20-21

2. Purity of Church

1 Cor. 5:6-8

3. Reclamation of the wayward:

Mt.18:15-20 (note context: *one of the these of these* and the goal of winning the brother.)

1 Cor. 5:5

2 Tim.2:24-26

**IV. Stages of Discipline:**

T. David Gordon: "I refer to "stages" rather than "steps." At the positive level, we do not instruct merely once ("a step"), but many times. We do not pray merely once, but regularly, repeatedly. Even when the "remedial" aspects begin, I believe that there are "stages," not "steps," because I believe that the effort to win a brother "alone" should not be hastily or perfunctorily done. It is not a "step" one passes quickly by, but a stage which may require many visits, as long as there is any reasonable possibility that progress is being made."

1. The positive Dimension: "teaching to observe all that Jesus commanded"

Matt. 28:18-20, 1 Tim.4:6-16

(Instruction, Catechism, Corporate Worship, Godly example, Sacraments, Other?)

2. The prevenient dimension: "watching over souls to prevent their going astray.

Heb. 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-4

(Regular Visitations, Prayers)

3. The remedial dimension: "correcting or pronouncing judgment on the wayward."

1 Cor. 5, 2 Tim. 2:24-26, 1 Tim. 1:19-20

1. Private stage: "go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone."

2. Arbitration stage: "But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you" (note: who one takes must be carefully considered as one who is a christian witness and is in him/herself a mature and responsible Christian. Preferably an officer of the church.)

3. Ecclesiastical/formal stage: "If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." (Note: "church" in Mt. 18 refers to ruling/ judicial courts. See previous study on "church.")

**V. Difficulties of Discipline:**

(categories and quotes from T. David Gordon)

1. Personal: "It is hard for sinners to discipline sinners. We tend to either be too strict (Mt.7) or too lax (1 Cor. 5)

2. Exegetical:

*2 Peter 3:15-16*: "So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand."

2 Considerations:

What issues the Bible addresses: (BCO 29-1)

What the Bible teaches?

### 3. Cultural:

1. *Individualism*: People do not perceive themselves as either responsible for other or accountable to others.
2. *Voluntarism*: People believe that church membership is voluntary. (political voluntarism has been mistaken for moral voluntarism.)
3. *Rise of litigation* and litigiousness, including litigation against churches:
4. *Sentimentalism*: Few people are capable of the kind of dispassionate judgment which discipline requires; they tend to sympathize with a party or against a party. Can't allow personal feelings and personal issues cloud the objective work of discipline. This is not to say that we are unfeeling and uncaring in how we deal with others.

## VI. Limitations of Church Discipline:

(from James Bannerman)

1. "*The judicial power of the Church is limited by a regard to the authority of Christ as the source of it.*" All authority is under and derived from the authority of Christ as the "Chief Shepherd." (2 Peter 5)
2. "*The judicial power of the Church in the way of discipline is limited by the Word of God as the rule of its exercise.. Beyond that rule, the Church has no right of discipline, and no authority to enforce it.*" (BCO, 27-5)
3. "*The power of the Church in the way of discipline is limited by the nature of it, as exclusively a spiritual power.* (Can only affect our relationship to church, not temporal affairs like taking away property or civil affairs like taking away voting privileges.)
4. "*The power of the Church in the way of discipline is limited by a regard to the liberties and edification of its members.*"
  1. It is always considered remedial rather than punitive as dealing with those in the church of Christ.
  2. Respects the freedom of conscience in those areas where Scripture is either silent or permissive.  
Rom.14:13-17

### BCO 27-4:

The power which Christ has given the Church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is to be exercised as under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. As in the preaching of the Word the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the Church authoritatively separates between the holy and the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus. Discipline is systematic training under the authority of God's Scripture. No communing or non-communing member of the Church should be allowed to stray for the Scripture's discipline. Therefore, teaching elders must: a) instruct the officers in discipline, b) instruct the Congregation in discipline, c) jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and church courts.