

Systematic Theology, Lesson 32: Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church, Part 3

1. The Powers of the Church

a. Officers.¹ Two officers in the local church:

i. Elders

1. Pattern: _____ of elders within local churches

- a. **Acts 14:23:** When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
- b. **Titus 1:5:** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

2. Names: elder, pastor, overseer/bishop refer to the same office with the same authority

- a. **Acts 20:17, 28:** From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. . . . Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [or bishops], to shepherd [i.e., pastor] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
- b. **Titus 1:5, 7:** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. . . . For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain.

3. Functions: preach/teach, pray, shepherd, and rule/govern

- a. **Acts 6:4:** But we [elders] will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

¹ An "apostle" in the technical/narrow sense is an officer of the church, but this office ceased in the first century. An "apostle" in the nontechnical/broad sense simply means "messenger" or "sent one." For more the office of apostle, see: Jeff Rich, "Spiritual Gifts, Lesson 3," lecture available at GCBC sermonaudio.com webpage.

- b. **1 Pet 5:2:** shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.
- c. **1 Tim 5:17:** The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

4. Qualifications

- a. **1 Tim 3:2-7:** An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.
- b. **Titus 1:6-9:** *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

ii. Deacons

1. Functions:

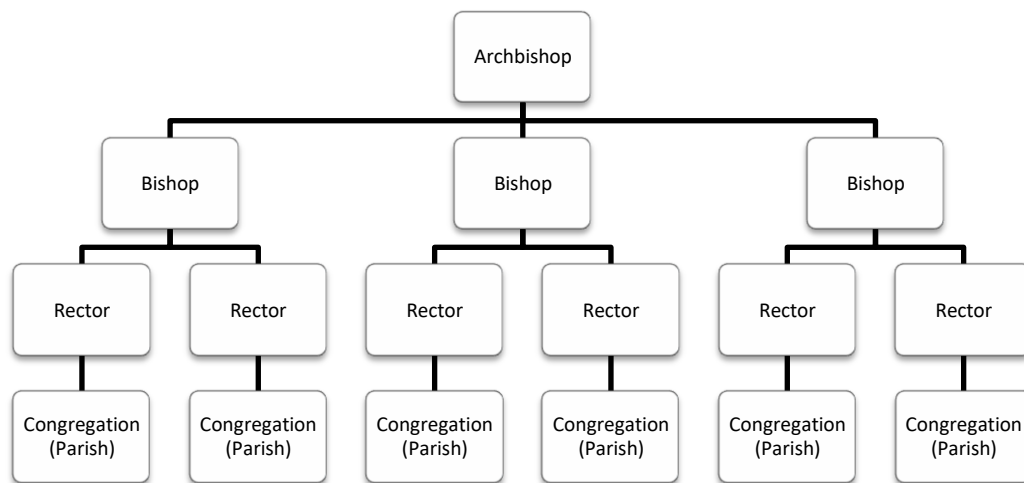
- a. The word "deacon" comes from the Greek word translated " ." Therefore, at the most basic level, the function of a deacon is a servant.

- b. A deacon primarily serves the _____ needs of the congregation (see **Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:8-13**).
 - c. Though deacons do not have governing/ruling authority in the church, they are still officers and leaders in the church.
 - 2. Qualifications: **1 Tim 3:8-13**: Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
 - iii. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 5): . . . The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor teachers) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications. We further teach that these offices of leadership are to be held by men.
- b. Government. Three basic views of church government:
 - i. Episcopalianism²
 - 1. Terms
 - a. Archbishop: an ordained clergy having authority over several bishops.
 - b. Diocese: the group of churches under the jurisdiction of an archbishop.
 - c. Bishop: an ordained clergy having authority over a few churches.

² For more on the development of Episcopalian government in church history, see: Dan Burrus, “Church History, Lesson 3: The Ancient Church, Part 2,” lecture available at gracelakeville.org.

- d. Rector (or vicar): the officer in charge of a local _____ (i.e., church).

2. Structure



3. Representatives: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, Eastern Orthodox

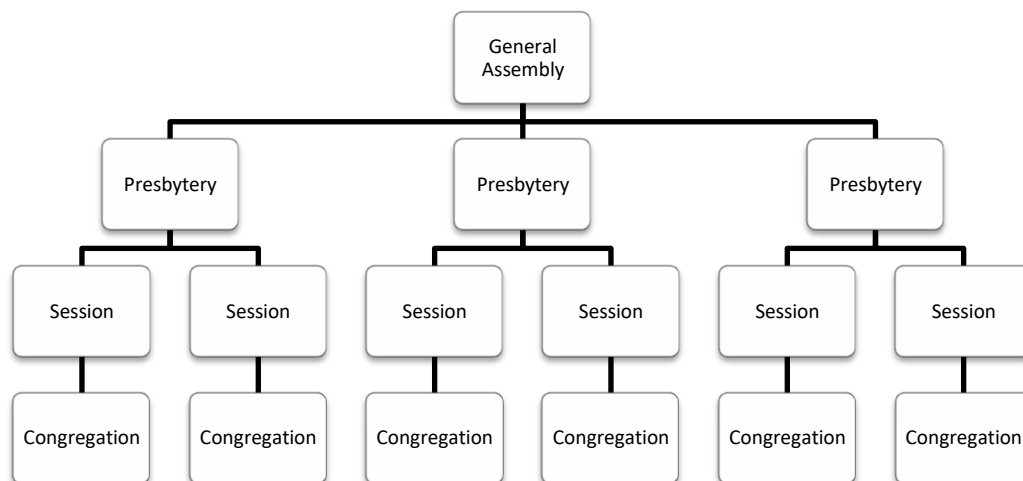
ii. Presbyterianism

1. Terms

- a. Elders: ordained clergy elected by the local congregation.
- b. Pastor: usually one (depending on the size of the congregation) of the elders of the local congregation, in equal _____ with the other elders.
- c. Session (or consistory): a group of elders at the local church level who have governing authority.
- d. Presbytery (or classis): elders from several churches (not necessary all the elders at one local church) that have authority over several churches

- e. General Assembly (or Synod): some of the elders from the presbytery are members of a general assembly which has authority of a region of churches or nation of churches.

2. Structure



3. Representatives: Presbyterian, Reformed

iii. Congregationalism

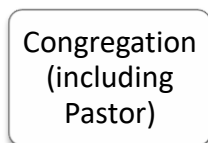
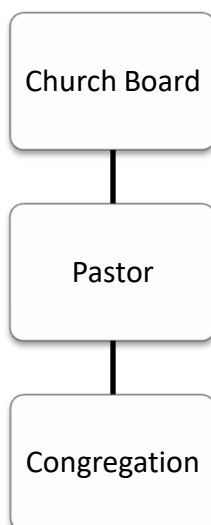
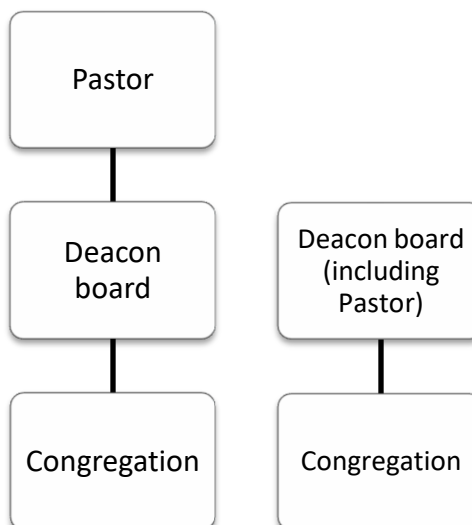
1. Terms

- a. Elder: an ordained (or appointed or elected) leader with governing authority.
- b. Pastor: an ordained minister, sometimes with governing authority (depending on the model).
- c. Deacon: an ordained (or appointed or elected) leader with serving authority.
- d. Church Board: congregationally selected members of the church with governing authority.

2. Structure

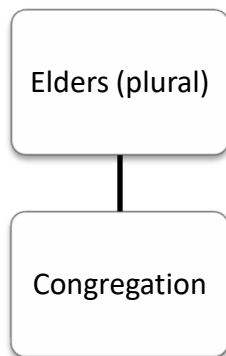
- a. No government but the _____

b. Pure democracy

c. Church board³d. Single Pastor⁴ (two models)

³ In some churches, the church board is the deacon board.

⁴ Depending on the size of the church, sometimes multiple pastors exist in one congregation. In some of these churches the pastors have equal authority and in some of these churches a “senior pastor” has official and/or functional authority over the other pastors.

e. Plural local elders⁵

3. Representatives: Baptist, Congregational, other evangelical churches not part of Episcopalian or Presbyterian forms of church government.
4. Two clarifications on congregationalism:
 - a. Congregationalism does not necessarily mean that a church is governed by a _____. Rather, it means that a church governs itself without external religious authority (i.e., autonomous).
 - b. Congregationalism does not mean that churches cannot _____ together (e.g., convention, association, fellowship, etc.). The key is autonomy at the local church level must be maintained.
5. Congregationalism is GCBC's form of government, specifically the "plural local elders" (letter e above) form of congregationalism. **GCBC Statement of Faith:** ("The Church" paragraph 8): We teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations. We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Local churches, however, through their pastors and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation.

⁵ Sometimes in this form of church government, one of the elders is called a pastor while the other are called elders. Also, sometimes the elders have authority over the pastor, and sometimes the elders and pastor have equal authority.

iv. Reflections on church government

1. Spectrum. The three basic views of church government contain a spectrum of views within themselves. For example, the Episcopalian government of the Eastern Orthodox churches differs from the Episcopalian government of the Roman Catholic Church: the Eastern Orthodox churches do not have one supreme authority head, but the Roman Catholic Church does, namely, the pope.
2. Differences. No matter which of the three forms of church government a particular local church embraces, because a spectrum exists, government from church to church with the same governmental type will exist, especially for congregationalism. For example, some congregational churches are ruled by elders only, while some congregational churches are ruled by congregational majority.
3. Appointment of officers. A major issue in each form of government has to do with how officers are chosen. In an Episcopalian system, in general, officers are chosen from the top. In a Presbyterian system, officers are chosen by the congregation (including the elders). In the Congregational system, officers are chosen a variety of ways: solely by the congregation, solely by the elders, or by some combination of both.
4. Diversity. While I would argue that the congregational form of government most aligns with Scripture, church government models are not explicit in Scripture, so we should allow for a diversity of opinion, within reason. However, churches should seek to align as close to the Bible as possible, and not simply settle for what is permissible (i.e., not explicitly forbidden in Scripture).
5. Strengths and weaknesses. Each church government system has inherent problems and is subject to abuse and corruption. While checks and balances may be put in place, each system has strengths and weaknesses, thus, no system is perfect. For example, one “strength” with the “single pastor” congregational model is that the church is led in one consistent direction. However, a weakness of this model is that one person at the top can use their power to lead the church in the wrong direction.

c. Authority. Three spheres of authority in the church:

- i. Christ has absolute authority as _____ ruler and head of the church.
 1. **Eph 1:22:** And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him [Christ] as head over all things to the church.
 2. **Col 1:18:** He [Christ] is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.
 3. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 5): We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. . . .

- ii. Elders have _____ authority from Christ to rule and govern Christ’s church according to the Scriptures.
 1. **Heb 13:17:** Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.
 2. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 6): We teach that the elders lead or rule as servants of Christ and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership.

- iii. The church has authority with the “keys of the kingdom.”
 1. What are the keys of the kingdom? Authority to grant _____ into the church and _____ from the church.
 - a. **Matt 16:19:** I [Jesus] will give you [Peter, and by extension the church] the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind [i.e., entrance] on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose [i.e., exit] on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.
 - b. **Matt 18:18:** Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

- c. Thus, the authority to “bind” and “loose” is not the authority to *make* a person a believer or not. Rather, it is the authority to *declare* a person a believer or not.
- 2. Who are the keys of the kingdom given to? The church.
- 3. How are the keys of the kingdom exercised?
 - a. Through preaching the gospel (**Acts 2:14-42**). In preaching the gospel, two things happen:
 - i. People _____ the church by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. People are _____ of the church because of failure to respond to the gospel.
 - b. Through church membership people enter the local church.
 - c. Through church discipline
 - i. What is church discipline? Two kinds: formative church discipline (i.e., education and discipleship) and corrective church discipline. In terms of the “keys of the kingdom” in **Matthew 18**, church discipline is the authority to *declare* a person an unbeliever.
 - ii. How should church discipline be practiced? Four steps are given in **Matt 18:15-17**.
 - 1. One to one correction (**v. 15**).
 - 2. Larger group correction (**v. 16**).
 - 3. Whole church correction (**v. 17a**).
 - 4. Excommunication (i.e., removal from church membership) (**v. 17b**).
 - 5. Note: while Jesus gives a general pattern, other instances in the New Testament regarding church discipline did not follow all

four steps (e.g., **1 Corinthians 5**; **Titus 3:10**). The principle is that corrective church discipline should increase in strength until there is resolution, whether that be excommunication or restoration.

- iii. Who is involved in church discipline? The entire _____ . Initially, one person from the congregation, then a few more from the congregation, then the entire church.
- iv. When should church discipline be practiced? When “your brother sins” (**Matt 18:15**).
- v. What sins should you correct a brother? Public (open), practice (unrepentant), and precise (Scriptural). All three elements should be present for correction to take place.
- vi. Who is subject to church discipline? Any member (including elders and deacons) of a local church.
- vii. What is the goal of church discipline? Repentance and restoration. “[Y]ou have won your brother” (**Matt 18:15**).
- viii. Why practice church discipline? To protect the gospel and Christ’s church.
- ix. What is the motive for church discipline? Not to win an argument or to be right; not to be theologically correct; not because it is protocol; we discipline because of love for God, the church, and people.
- x. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“The Church,” paragraph 7): We teach the importance of discipleship, mutual accountability of all believers to each other, as well as the need for discipline of sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture.