

## Church Government Lesson #1

What do people think of when they think of “Presbyterians”?

Definition of government – the governing, or ruling body, of a group or community.

### What’s in a name?

The name of a group says a lot about the group, especially when it comes to churches.

- The word “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word “presbuteros” meaning elder.
- Presbyterianism is system of church government by “presbyters” or elders.
- Immediately we see that in Presbyterian churches, just in our name alone, church government is indeed esteemed very highly!

### Four Erroneous Assumptions Regarding Church Government

1) Church government doesn’t affect me.

Two characteristics necessary for the work of every society or organization: officers and laws. Officers are required to represent the group and to do the work of the organization. Laws are necessary in order to guide the group in its work.

Would you say civil government doesn’t affect you?

2) Church government is only for church officers

Church officers are representatives of the people. The decisions made at Presbytery/Synod often directly affect local churches.

3) Church government is not “essential” to the faith

4) Church government is all the same

When setting up an organization, there are essentially three ways to have organization run: Run by one person or run by all the people OR a balance in between.

**WCF 30.1** *The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.*

### Four biblical principles of Christian church government from WCF 30.1:

1) Christ is head over His Church.

Matt 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Christ commissions a group for making more followers of Christ. Jesus followers are granted power by Christ himself – power to gather disciples, administer sacraments, and teach His Word authoritatively.

Eph 1:22-22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over allthings to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

2) Christ Himself has appointed a form of church government for His church.

Acts 15:1-6,22 And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. <sup>3</sup> So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. <sup>4</sup> And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup> But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” <sup>6</sup> Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.  
<sup>22</sup> Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas...

3) This government Christ has put in the hand of church officers.

WLC Q. 45. *How doth Christ execute the office of a king? A. Christ executeth the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to himself, and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them;...*

Eph 4:11-12 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,...

4) Church government is distinct from the civil magistrate.

WCF 23.1 *God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.*

WCF 31.5 *Synods and councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth*