

## Church Government Lesson # 2

The word "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek word "*presbuteros*" meaning \_\_\_\_\_.  
Presbyterianism is system of church government by "presbyters" or \_\_\_\_\_.

### Four Erroneous Assumptions Regarding Church Government

- 1) Church government doesn't affect me.
- 2) Church government is only for church officers
- 3) Church government is not "essential" to the faith
- 4) Church government is all the same

### Three Views of Church Government

#### A. Episcopal View (Episcopal Church, Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican)

- Episcopacy/Episcopalian – from greek "*episkopos*" meaning 'overseer' or 'superintendent' and came to mean 'bishop'.
- Claims authority from Christ and His apostles by some direct, infallible, and uninterrupted apostolic succession.
- Defended primarily by ecclesiastical tradition and early church history.
- Community of believers has no share in the government of the Church - Bishops do *not* represent the people

##### 1. Roman Catholic System

- Claims apostolic succession all the way back to Peter, who is said to have primacy among the apostles.
- Line of successors from Peter are now recognized as the special representative (Vicar) of Christ (Pope).
- Roman Catholic Church is an absolute monarchy, under the control of an infallible Pope, who has the right to determine and regulate the doctrine, worship, and government, of the Church.
- The people have absolutely no voice in the government of the Church.

##### 2. Apostles – who were they?

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

- Apostolic office was *not* permanent in nature
- Apostles did form a clearly distinct and independent class, but it was not their special task to rule and administer the affairs of the churches.
- It was their duty to carry the gospel to unevangelized districts, to found churches, and then to appoint others from among the people for the task of ruling these churches.

#### B. Independent or Congregational View (Baptist, Non-denominational, Bible Churches)

- Church government by democracy, ruled by local believers (Opposite of episcopacy)
- Governing power rests exclusively with the members of the church
- Officers are simply functionaries of the local church, appointed to teach and to administer the affairs of the church, and have no governing power beyond that which they possess as members of the church.
- Local church is sufficient to itself, cannot be subject to other churches or inter-church organizations/councils

- Local churches seek voluntary consultations with other local churches in councils/conventions. Results are always purely advisory and never authoritative or binding. (Ex. Southern Baptist Convention)

### C. Presbyterian View

- Christ is the head of the church and the source of all its authority (Matt 28:18, Eph 1:20-22) not Pope, not State.
- The church, though many, is also spoken of in the singular, “the church” (Acts 5:11; 12:5; 15:4).
- Elders of the church are mentioned (Acts 11:30; 15:4,6,22; 21:17-18).
- The elders are shown meeting together to govern the church (Acts 11:30; 15:4,6,22; 21:17-18). This indicates a Presbyterian type of government, active in governing “the church” in Jerusalem.  
*“All Church power fundamentally, is in the Church itself; in its exercise, in them that are specially called thereto.”*

### **Two Reasons for Presbyterian Church Government**

1) Presbyterianism is biblical.

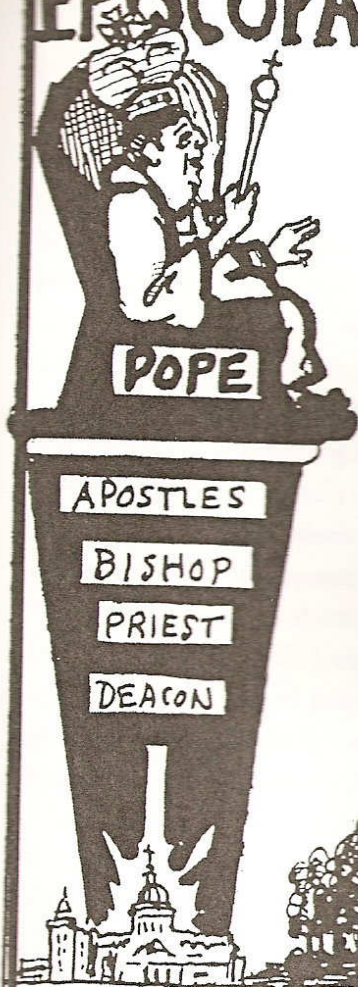
*“Does the Word of God afford us a model, more or less detailed, of ecclesiastical polity and organization, which it is the duty of Christians at all times and in all circumstances to imitate; or is there no authoritative delineation or exhibition of Church government at all, so that it is left to be regulated entirely by the dictates of human expediency or Christian prudence?” – James Bannerman*

*“This theory of popular government (Congregationalist), making the office of the ministry altogether dependent on the action of the people, is certainly not in harmony with what we learn from the Word of God. Moreover, the theory that each church is independent of every other church, fails to express the unity of the Church of Christ, has a disintegrating effect, and opens the door for all kinds of arbitrariness in church government. There is no appeal from any of the decisions of the local church.” - L. Berkhof*

2) Man is sinful

*“And to the terms and manner of his restored fellowship with God in acceptable worship, must we add the constitutions and regulations of the worshipping society, as a point more especially beyond the power or competency of a sinner to determine. Neither in regard to the services and ordinances of worship, nor in regard to the constitution and order of the church, are we justified in saying that these are lawful matters for human arrangement or decision.” - James Bannerman*

# EPISCOPAL



TRADITIONS

# PRESBYTERIAN

GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
ELDERS & PASTORS

SYNOD  
ELDERS & PASTORS

PRESBYTERY

PASTOR  
SESSION



# LOCAL CHURCH INDEPENDENT



BIBLE

NEW TESTAMENT

MONARCHIAL - REPRESENTATIVE - DEMOCRATIC