

The Church and Its Government
Ephesians 4:7-14; Acts 15:1-29; Matthew 18:18-20
June 3, 2007

I. The Nature of Church Power and Authority

A. By whose authority? (Eph. 4:7-14)

1. Christ as king and head of the church (Eph. 4:15-16; 5:23)

2. Christ appoints rulers

“The officers of the Church are the representatives of the people chosen by popular vote. This does not mean, however, that they receive their authority from the people, for the call of the people is but the confirmation of the inner call by the Lord Himself; and it is from Him that they receive their authority and to Him that they are responsible.”¹

B. Spiritual or moral power of the church

1. rule by Christ and by His Spirit

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

2. pertains exclusively to believers

I Cor. 5:12-13 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

3. exercised in moral and spiritual way

II Cor. 10:4-5 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

C. Ministerial and declarative power

1. not independent or sovereign

Matt. 23:8-10 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers . . . Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

2. rather a ministry or service (see also Acts 20:24)

I Peter 5:2-3 ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

3. from and under the sovereign authority of Christ (Mt. 28:18)

4. exercised according to Christ’s Word and Spirit

I Corinthians 5:4-5 ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), 584.

II. The Organization of a Presbyterian Form of Government

A. Christ as King and Head of His Church

1. **vital and organic headship (see John 15:1-8; Eph. 2:20-22)**
2. **ruling and authoritative headship (Eph. 5:23-24)**

B. The Local Session

1. **plurality of elders (see also James 5:14)**

Acts 14:23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

2. **made and established by God (Eph. 4:7-11)**

3. **selected by the church as confirmation of God's call (Acts 6:3)**

"God qualifies men with spiritual gifts; but the church must learn how to recognize those men so qualified and then must proceed to set them apart to the holy office of elder . . . It is a high privilege to be allowed to choose one's own spiritual rulers, and abuse of that privilege exacts a fearful price."²

4. **responsibility and labor**

- a. **keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:19; 18:18, 20)**

- b. **ministry of the Word**

Acts 2:20 I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house

- c. **rule and teach – parts of the same task**

"It is quite unrealistic to separate the teaching from the ruling function in the work of the elder. All elders rule by teaching – and teach by ruling – even though at times they may be concentrating chiefly on one aspect."³

5. **submission due to the session**

- a. **instruction for believers**

Hebrews 13:17 ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

- b. **instruction for elders (Mt. 11:29, I Pet. 5:1-3)**

Matthew 20:25-26 ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,"

C. Presbytery and the General Assembly (Acts 15)

1. **Is this a higher authority than the session?**
2. **The principle of organic union – one body united by one Head**
3. **Exercise the same power on a broader scale**

² Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975), 9 and 11.

³ *Ibid*, 18.