

Officer Training
Form of Government, Membership,
Ordination and Church Courts
Lesson 11

Introduction:

In a sense every single _____ of the church is an _____:
Every child of God is a prophet, priest and king. ¹

This is in part what it means to be an image bearer (defaced by sin and being restored by redemption)

Ephesians 4:24 “... put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Colossians 3:10 “... put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Righteousness = _____

Holiness = _____

Knowledge = _____

The fulfillment of Moses wish in **Numbers 11:29**, “... that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” Is found in **Joel 2:28-29** “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” Which of course is linked to the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16ff.)

This teaching about the universal priesthood of all believers is reinforced by the rending of the veil in the temple at Christ’s death (Matthew 27:51).

A COUPLE OF OTHER PASSAGES STRENGTHENING THIS POINT:

Revelation 1:5b-6 “... To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

R. B. Kuiper: “Precisely expressed, the special offices are rooted in the universal office (possessed by every believer). For that reason the members of the church choose, or ought to choose, their own officers. In such churches as the Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic the officers are not ordinarily chosen from below but are appointed from above. The simple explanation is that these churches deny to all

¹ This thought developed by R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966, pp. 126-131.

intents and purposes the universal office of believers. A church which gives full recognition to the universal office of believers will insist that its members choose their own officers.”²

The special offices (elders and deacons) are primarily servant leaders of the other officers to help them execute their callings ...

Prophet ... ministry of the Word ... _____ ... Didactic
Priest ... ministry of mercy and service ... _____ ... Distribution
King ... ministry of rule ... _____ ... Direction

I. The Various Forms of Church Government

- A. _____ – the principle of a hierarchy of rank and office in the ministerial order, maintaining a diocesan episcopate – usually, strongly emphasizes the distinction between the clergy and the laity. E.g. Roman Catholic, Anglican, most Methodists.

Clergy Rule ... _____

- B. _____ – “Refuse to admit any gradation in the ministerial office and at the same time oppose the idea of gradation in church courts, insisting on the independency of each congregation, giving to church members the decision in all church matters without subjecting the congregational judgment to the review of any higher judicature.”³

Member Rule ... _____

- C. _____ – Insist upon parity of ministerial rank (both lay and clerical elders) while recognizing a gradation in church courts through session, Presbytery & Synod. (or General Assembly)

Representative Rule ... _____

Though the elders (rulers) hold office as representatives of the people, they are not mere delegates of the people. Their ultimate responsibility is to Christ, the head of the Church ... a kind of constitutional monarchy.

Lous Berkhof, Systematic Theology, pg. 589 “The election by the people is merely an external confirmation of the inner calling by the Lord Himself. Moreover, the elders, though representatives of the people, do not derive their authority from the people, but from the Lord of the Church. They exercise rule over the house of God in the name of the King, and are responsible only to Him.”

² Ibid., p. 134.

³ John Macpherson, *Presbyterianism*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1949, p. 1.

Most Presbyterians maintain a “jus divinum” (divine right) (only view found in Scripture) concept of this form of government - - - this is in terms of the fundamental principles not the individual particulars.

Macpherson on the contrast between congregational democracy and presbyterial constitutionalism: “A democracy in church or state, wanting the representative principle, oscillates between anarchy and tyranny. Constitutionalism preserves democracy from overthrow in either of these extremes. In matters of church organization and government, Presbyterianism is the constitutionalism which at once recognizes popular rights, assigning the right of church power to the whole church, and conserves these rights for the adequate accomplishment of those ends for which they have been conferred.”⁴

I. The Officers of the Church⁵

1. Extraordinary Officers

A. _____ . They had special qualifications which by their very nature meant that no new Apostles have been given by God since the end of the 1st generation following Christ’s ascension and the closing of the canon of Scripture.

_____:

- i. _____ They received their commission directly from Jesus Christ (Mark 3:14; Galatians 1:1)
- ii. _____ They were witnesses of the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:1)
- iii. _____ They were conscious of being inspired (1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:8)
- iv. _____ They confirmed their message by miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4)
- v. _____ They were richly blessed as a sign of the divine approval of their labors (1 Corinthians 9:1; 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3; Galatians 2:8)

B. _____ . Acts 11:28; 13:1, 2; 15:32; 1 Corinthians 12:10; 13:2; 14:3; Ephesians 2:20; 4:11. These were men who were specially gifted to speak for the edification of the church, and were occasionally instrumental in revealing mysteries and predicting future events.

2. Ordinary Officers

A. _____

⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵ Material in the sections on Officers and Major Assemblies is taken in large part from Louis Berkhof, Manual of Christian Doctrine, 2nd Edition, Arlington Heights, Ill.: Christian Liberty Press, 1933, 2nd edition, 2003, p. 119-121.

The Second Book of Discipline of the Scottish church drawn up by Andrew Melville and others sees a three fold division of church offices: “The whole policy of the Kirk consists in three things, in doctrine, in discipline, and distribution. With doctrine is annexed the administration of sacraments; and according to the parts of this division, arises a sort of three fold officer in the Kirk, to wit, of ministers or preachers, elders or governors, and deacons or distributors, and all these may be called by a general word, ministers of the Kirk.”

1. The Elder as a _____

The office of Ruling Elder was not a novelty to the Apostles or those whom they addressed. The synagogue system was built on such a governmental structure.

Each synagogue had elders (gerousia) and a president called an Archelder (gerousiarches). It was natural, then, that in the earliest Christian congregations, which, indeed, in Palestine were for some time known as “Christian Synagogues”, this characteristic office should be continued and little explanation in the N.T. was required.

Ruling and Teaching as distinct functions:

1 Timothy 5:17, 18 “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages.’”

This is a distinction of qualifications / gifts, not office or appointment

The essential, indispensable ingredient is ruling (Proestos) because one who “rules well” is regarded as fulfilling creditably the duties of the office.

1 Thessalonians 5:12; Romans 12:8 proistamenoι ...
“those who are set over others.”

EPISKOPOS Acts 20:28’ I Peter 5:2

Overseer = _____ of office; “elder” points to _____ of office

With regard to teaching – “aptness” is required of all (cf. Titus 1:9)

“_____” comes from word which means, “to sit” ... idea of ones who sit together and adjudicate ... make decisions.

Lawrence Eyres, *The Elders of the Church*, p. 14 said elders sometimes think that “sitting” is all they’re supposed to do ...

“They forget that elders as Christ’s undershepherds, must also STAND to minister to the saints; they must WALK (and sometimes run) to seek Christ’s wandering sheep; they must KNEEL daily to lift up the flock before the throne of grace in prayer!”

2. The Elder as a _____
[Two shepherd functions: Feed – teach / Guide – rule]

Acts 20:28 ... “shepherd (pastor) the church of God . . .

I Timothy 3:2 “ ... able to teach ... “
Titus 1:9 “ ... that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”

Hebrews 13:7 “Remember your leaders, WHO SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD TO YOU. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

John Macpherson, on the development of a separate ministerial office (Teaching/Ruling Presbyter as distinct from one who only rules.)
“It is not to the very earliest years of Christianity that we can go back for the first view of the preacher as a distinct and recognized office bearer of the church. At first all preached and all baptized. It is when we pass to the later period of the Apostolic Age – perhaps to the last decade of the first century – that we find unmistakable traces of the regular appointment, in several churches, of stated and regular ministers of the word. The Apostles and Evangelists exercised their ministry wherever they went. The elders ordained in every church, besides ministering themselves, secured an edifying and orderly exercise of the gifts of unofficial but spiritually-endowed members. When, in the churches generally, those supernatural gifts were discontinued, the distinction among the Presbyters, according to the predominance of preaching or ruling power, which had already shown itself in the Apostles’ time (I Tim. 5:17), became more marked; the preaching function gained prominence, until what had been simply a distinction of gift and function became a distinction of offices.”⁶

Louis Berkhof in his Systematic Theology (p.586) also links the rise of the distinct teaching office to the rise and increase of heresies after the Apostle’s died. He also called the “aggeloi” (angels) of the 7 Asia Minor churches the teaching elders of those churches.

- B. The Office of _____

The 1st office instituted by the Apostles.

Phil. 1:1; I Timothy 3:8, 10, 12

THE IMPACT OF THE DIACONAL OFFICE IN CHARITY AND WELFARE IN SOCIETY:

⁶ Macpherson, Op. Cit., pp. 82-83.

Berkhof: “The Lord clearly intended that the Church should make provision for her poor. He hinted at this duty when He said to His disciples: “For ye have the poor always with you,” saw to it that no one wanted the necessaries of life, Acts 4:34. There can be no doubt about the duty of the Church in this respect. And the deacons are the officers who are charged with the responsible and delicate task of performing the work of Christian benevolence with reference to all the needy of the church. They must devise ways and means for collecting the necessary funds, have charge of the money collected and provide for its prudential distribution. However, their task is not limited to this offering of material help. They must also instruct and comfort the needy. In all their work they should consider it their duty to apply spiritual principles in the performance of their duty. It is to be feared that this function of the Church is sadly neglected in many of the churches today. There is a tendency to proceed on the assumption that it can safely be left to the State to provide even for the poor of the Church. But in acting on that assumption, the Church is neglecting a sacred duty, is impoverishing her own spiritual life, is robbing herself of the joy experienced in ministering to the needs of those who suffer want, and is depriving those who are suffering hardships, who are borne down by the cares of life, and who are often utterly discouraged, of the comfort, the joy, and the sunshine of the spiritual ministrations of Christian love, which are as a rule entirely foreign to the work of charity administered by the State.”⁷

C. The Concept of Representative Rule – _____?

Acts 1:21-26; 6:1-6; Acts 14:23 (see also Titus 1:5 and I Tim. 5:22)

“appoint” = *cheriotoneo*, “to elect by a show of hands” – a common procedure in the Greek city state – Liddell & Scott; Arndt & Gingrich

Church Orders – The Doctrine of Vocation

16-1. Ordinary vocation to office in the Church is the calling of God by the Spirit, through the inward testimony of a good conscience, the manifest approbation of God’s people, and the concurring judgment of a lawful court of the Church.

16-2. The government of the Church is by officers gifted to represent Christ, and the right of God’s people to recognize by election to office those so gifted is inalienable. Therefore no man can be placed over a church in any office without the election, or at least the consent of that church.

16-3. Upon those whom God calls to bear office in His Church He bestows suitable gifts for the discharge of their various duties. And it is indispensable that, besides possessing the necessary gifts and abilities,

⁷ Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 602.

natural and acquired, every one admitted to an office should be sound in the faith, and his life be according to godliness. Wherefore every candidate for office is to be approved by the court by which he is to be ordained.

Doctrine of Ordination

17-1. Those who have been called to office in the Church are to be inducted by the ordination of a court.

17-2. Ordination is the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship.

17-3. As every ecclesiastical office, according to the Scriptures, is a special charge, no man shall be ordained unless it be to the performance of a definite work.

D. The Relative _____ of the Local Church.

“Reformed Church government recognizes the autonomy of the local church. This means:

1. That every local church is a complete church of Christ, fully equipped with everything that is required for its government. It has absolutely no need of it that any government should be imposed upon it from without. And not only that, but such an imposition would be absolutely contrary to its nature.
2. That though there can be a proper affiliation or consolidation of contiguous churches, there may be no union which destroys the autonomy of the local church. Hence it is better not to speak of classes and synods (Presbytery and General Assembly) as higher, but describe them as major or more general assemblies. They do not represent a higher, but the very same, power that inheres in the consistory (session), though exercising this on a broader scale. McGill speaks of them as higher and remoter tribunals.”⁸

BCO 11-3. All Church courts are one in nature, constituted of the same elements, possessed inherently of the same kinds of rights and powers, and differing only as the Constitution may provide. When, however, according to Scriptural example, and needful to the purity and harmony of the whole Church, disputed matters of doctrine and order arising in the lower courts are referred to the higher courts for decision, such referral shall not be so exercised as to impinge upon the authority of the lower court.

BCO 11-4. For the orderly and efficient dispatch of ecclesiastical business, it is necessary that the sphere of action of each court should be distinctly defined. The Session exercises jurisdiction over a single church, the Presbytery over what is common to the ministers, Sessions, and churches within a prescribed district,

⁸ Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 589-590.

and the General Assembly over such matters as concern the whole Church. The jurisdiction of these courts is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution. Every court has the right to resolve questions of doctrine and discipline seriously and reasonably proposed, and in general to maintain truth and righteousness, condemning erroneous opinions and practices which tend to the injury of the peace, purity, or progress of the Church. Although each court exercises exclusive original jurisdiction over all matters especially belonging to it, the lower courts are subject to the review and control of the higher courts, in regular gradation. These courts are not separate and independent tribunals, but they have a mutual relation, and every act of jurisdiction is the act of the whole Church performed by it through the appropriate organ.

An examination of key church government features at TOPC in the last quarter of 2006 ... a “Presbyterian Laboratory” ...

1. How may a session remove a pastor?

BCO chapter 23 ... Principle: dissolution of the pastoral relation is the inauguration of the pastoral relation in reverse.

What is the role of the session and what is the role of the congregation?

2. How may a local session appeal to Presbytery for help?

BCO 41, Reference