

The Origin and Nature of the Church

In the Old Testament, Israel was sometimes called the congregation or _____ of God (Exodus 12:6).

In extra-biblical usage, the Greek word *ekklesia* simply meant a _____, as opposed to a body of people which meets together. But in the New Testament, most of the occurrences of the word pertain to local churches.

Jesus is the _____ of the Christian church.

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Matthew 16:18

“¹⁵ Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault, between you and him alone; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷ And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector. 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. ¹⁹ “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” Matthew 18:15-20

The following metaphors are among those used of the church in the New Testament:

- _____ of Christ (Ephesians 4:12)
- _____ of God (1 Peter 2:9-10)
- _____ of light (Luke 16:8)
- _____ of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2)
- _____ (1 Peter 1:1)

- _____ of God (John 10:16)
- Abraham's _____ (Galatians 3:29)
- _____ man (Ephesians 2:15)

The Ordinances of the Church

Baptism

In light of unbiblical practices that have developed over the centuries by many churches and denominations, it is helpful to clarify what Scripture says about baptism

- What is baptism? It is the public identification of one's life with _____ .
- Who should be baptized? Water baptism is intended _____ for the person who has believed in the good news about Jesus Christ and has become His disciple.
- Why should a person be baptized? To _____ the command of Christ, show others that one is a disciple of Christ, and follow the example of Christ.
- When should a person be baptized? As soon as the person has _____ in Christ. In the New Testament, baptisms were never delayed.
- How should a person be baptized? By _____. The meaning of *baptizo* in the New Testament is "to plunge or submerge." Union with Christ's death and resurrection is best expressed through immersion. Also, where there is description of the baptisms in the New Testament, they were all by immersion.
- Where should a person be baptized? Wherever there is _____.
- What is the relationship between baptism and church membership? Christian baptism—done for the right reason and according to the right mode—is a prerequisite for membership in a local church. Church membership is not for

persons who are unregenerate or knowingly dismissive of Christ's lordship. This is categorized by theologians as *strict* or *close* membership.

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper goes by different names in the New Testament, including: _____ (meaning "to give thanks;" 1 Corinthians 11:24), the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20), the Lord's _____ (1 Corinthians 10:21); and *koinonia* (sometimes translated as "communion;" 1 Corinthians 10:16).

The principles reflected in partaking of the Lord's Supper include remembrance (and reenactment), thanksgiving, communion (or fellowship), and expectation.

The question has arisen whether churches should practice _____ communion, in which any proclaiming believer may participate in the Lord's Supper; or _____ communion, in which communion is restricted only to those who are members of that local church. Generally speaking, closed communion enables a church to easily mark those members who are under church discipline by withholding communion from them, but churches with open communion can still carry out church discipline.

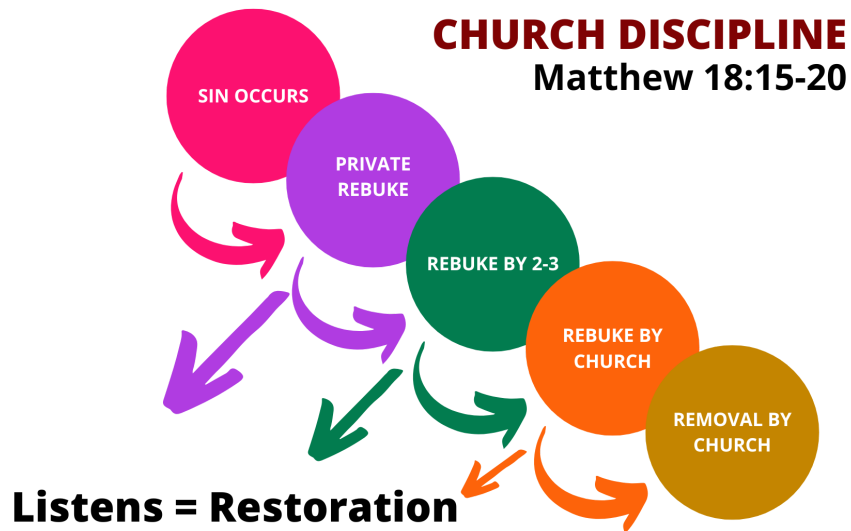
Membership of Churches

"The books of the New Testament canon know of no true disciples of Jesus who persist outside the company of the believers or disciples."¹

Churches that practice congregational polity normally receive new members by vote of the congregation, and they may require member candidates to fulfill certain prerequisites prior to membership.

For some _____ church members, God Himself may intervene (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Yet the church cannot simply sit idly by as its members disregard the lordship of Christ, who gave specific instructions for church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20.

¹ Garrett, Vol. 2, 590.



Polity of Churches

Papal polity is based upon an appeal to Peter being “the rock” upon which Christ built His church. Episcopal polity is based upon an appeal to a succession of all apostles.

Presbyterial polity is based upon Paul’s appointment of elders. In contrast to these, with congregational polity the congregation is the final authority as it governs itself under the lordship of Jesus Christ—who is the Head of the church—and by the leadership of the Holy Spirit. There is no outside governing ecclesial body, making each local church autonomous.

The New Testament gives the church two offices: pastors/elders/overseers and deacons.

Pastors/Elders/Overseers

The terms “pastor,” “elder,” and “overseer” are used interchangeably in relation to the church in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-2, indicating that these are three ways of emphasizing the same office. The predominate term used to describe this office in the New Testament is _____.

Responsibilities

Biblical elders must:

- _____ the flock:
 - From false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-31), which requires a thorough knowledge of the Bible (Titus 1:5, 6, 9)
 - By seeking sheep who have gone astray
 - By disciplining sin, admonishing improper behavior and attitudes (1 Thessalonians 5:12), and stopping bitter infighting.
 - By remaining spiritually alert (Acts 20:31)
- _____ the flock by teaching God's Word (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17, 18; Titus 1:9)
- _____ the flock (Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2), working hard to provide it management, governance, guidance, counsel, and vision. "When the church eldership is viewed as a status or board position in the church there will be plenty of volunteers, but when it is viewed as a demanding, pastoral work, few will rush to volunteer."²
- _____ for the flock's practical needs. James 5:14 instructs sick members of the flock to call for the elders of the church. Elders must be available to visit the sick, comfort the bereaved, strengthen the weak, pray for all the sheep (including the ones that have a tendency to bite), be hospitable to new members, provide counsel to those facing major decisions, and manage the many day-to-day details of the congregation. However, the elders are not *the* church's ministers. Ministry is the work of the whole church, and all Christians are called "ministers" (servants) in the New Testament.
- _____ the flock. Phillip Keller described the Lord's heart as a Shepherd this way: "All the care, all the work, all the alert watchfulness, all the skill, all the concern,

² Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995), 27.

all the self-sacrifice are born of His Love—the love of One who loves His sheep, loves His work, loves His role as a Shepherd.”³

Plurality

An often-overlooked aspect of church leadership is that Jesus gave the Church a plurality of leadership, as evidenced by the Twelve apostles and the Seven proto-deacons (Acts 6:3-6). This pattern continues in the New Testament with pastoral oversight of churches.

- The elders of the Jerusalem church worked with the apostles over a doctrinal controversy (Acts 15).
- James instructed the sick to call for the elders [plural] of the church [singular] (James 5:14).
- At the end of Paul’s first missionary journey, he appointed elders for each church (Acts 14:23).
- When passing by the city of Ephesus, Paul summoned the “elders of the church” (Acts 20:17, 28). Also at Ephesus, 1 Timothy 5:17 explicitly says that there were a plurality of elders.
- Paul’s letter to the Philippians contains a greeting to “the overseers [plural] and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).
- Paul instructed Titus to “set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you” (Titus 1:5).
- Peter exhorted the elders to pastor the flock (1 Peter 5:1) in his letter to churches scattered throughout the five Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

In all eighteen New Testament passages which mention local church leadership on a pastoral level, there is not one passage which describes a church being governed by _____ pastor.

³ Keller, Phillip W. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 130.

Should a church desire to transition from a single-pastor governance to that of a biblical model—a plurality of pastors—there are some things it must consider:

- The transition must be attempted carefully and cautiously, as many questions require a careful _____ of God’s Word on the matter.
- A biblical council of elders is a council of _____. The elders share equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office. The weaknesses of one man can be balanced by the strengths of the others. The council would improve the character and ministry of any individual elder, and it would stave off the abnormal and corrupting influence of being in a sole position at the top. It would lighten the work load of each and provide accountability to each.
- In a council of biblical elders, there would still be a “first among equals.” Jesus established this dynamic with Peter, as well as with Peter, James, and John among the apostles. Paul mentioned the Three as being pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9). The council of elders would not be “associates” of the lead pastor, nor would they simply be a council of church members that meet regularly to provide feedback for the lead pastor’s ministry. Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as an associate pastor, and the church should reserve the term “pastor” in any form only to those staff members who are qualified to be such and are recognized by the church as being called to serve as a pastor.

Qualifications

The qualifications of pastor/elders may be found in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 2:12-3:7. The overarching qualification for pastors is that they must be _____.

Pastors, unlike deacons, must also be able to _____.⁴ If an otherwise qualified man is unable to teach the sound doctrine of God’s Word, he may serve in various other capacities, but he may not be allowed to be a pastor.

⁴ Some of the best Bible teachers in the church are, in fact, deacons. This is a testament to their personal devotion to the Lord and His Word. Being able to teach, however, is not a qualification to become a deacon.

Pastors must be _____. This is the explicit teaching of 1 Timothy 2:12, the model of apostolic leadership in the New Testament, and the model of New Testament churches. Male leadership in the church is in complete agreement with husband-wife roles with regard to headship and submission in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:1, 4-5). Male leadership in the church is also instructed in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-38.

Deacons

The other office described in the New Testament is that of deacon. The words translated "deacon" mean "_____", "minister," or even "slave." Sometimes the word is used generally of all Christians, and at other times it is used specifically of those serving the church in an official capacity. Context usually determines the specific idea involved.

Responsibilities

Deacons are to be ministers of _____ to people in need of service and love. They are to emulate the Lord's example of humility and compassion.

The priorities of the shepherds are the _____ and _____ (Acts 6:1-4). Out of a specific need at the church in Jerusalem, the ministry of deacons was born. The congregation selected for themselves men of good reputation who could serve widows in need.

Although the work of deacons and elders often overlap, it is important for both to work together for the benefit of God's people. Alexander Strauch issues an important word to churches that have an unbiblical understanding of the role of deacons:

In many churches, deacons misunderstand their role. They think that they comprise a second group of overseer-elders or that they are to provide checks and balances for the shepherds. If deacons control the finances, they often think they control the church. This should not be. It is plain from everything we have studied that deacons are subordinate to overseers. We must also understand that shepherds can perform all the functions of deacons, but deacons cannot perform all the functions of shepherds. Unlike deacons, shepherds are responsible for the overall leadership, supervision, and teaching of the congregation. This includes handling and

overseeing the church's funds (Acts 11:30; 1 Peter 5:2). In the sense that shepherds oversee the entire church, they also oversee the deacons. Therefore, deacons are not independent of the leadership oversight of the shepherds.⁵

Qualifications

With the exception of being able to teach, deacons share many of the same qualifications as pastors. They should be above reproach and of good moral character.

Women Deacons?

Does 1 Timothy 3:11 teach that _____ can be deacons (e.g., perhaps Phoebe in Romans 16:1 as an example), or is it speaking of the _____ of deacons?⁶

⁵ Strauch, Alexander, *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1992), 78

⁶ For a study of two different viewpoints, see the appendices of this section.

Suggested Bibliography for the Doctrine of the Church

Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Leadership by Alexander Strauch

Handbook of Church Discipline by Jay Adams

Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon by Alexander Strauch