

(English Transcript)

Foundations of the Christian Faith – Course 3

Lesson 5: The Church – Its Governance, Ordinances and Worship

Welcome back to Foundations of the Christian Faith – Course 3. In Lesson 5 we will discuss the doctrine of the Church related to the governance of local churches, including biblical church officers and types of government. We will look at the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We will consider their biblical meaning and their proper practice. Finally, we will review the definition and purpose of worship and consider its results in our lives and its eternal value.

I. Church Governance

There are many different kinds of church government or polity around the world today. This refers to how a church's leadership is structured. The Bible seems to allow for a good deal of latitude here. However, some biblical guidelines are offered regarding forms of government and officers in a local church. While there are many variations and nuances found within individual churches (and these are too numerous to list), essentially all are variations of one of the following: episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational. (The subject may be complicated by the fact that there are denominations known by each of these names.) Every church is either independent, with no higher authority outside of that local church, or it is part of a larger group or denomination with leaders who exert control from outside the church.

The form of church government should not be a major doctrinal issue. The most important issue is that those who are in leadership positions must submit to the authority of Christ and obediently follow His lead as revealed in Scripture (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Christ is the Head of the Church, and if any system, board, individual leader, or congregation begins to displace Christ and the Word with their own beliefs and desires, then that leadership is no longer legitimate.

Church Officers

A church officer is "someone who has been publicly recognized as having the right and responsibility to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church" (Grudem, Systematic Theology, 1994). Two such officers are mentioned in Scripture, and other officers seem to be allowed, although not commanded, in the Bible. We will discuss the offices of Elder and Deacon.

Elder (Pastor/Overseer/Bishop)

The term 'Elder' refers to the broad responsibility of church leadership granted to those who demonstrate maturity and wisdom. Elders may have different leadership functions. There are three terms used for the elder role within a local church that appear to be interchangeable.

Presbuteros: Elder – 1 Peter 5:1, Titus 1:5, Acts 20:17

Episkopos: Overseer/Bishop – 1 Peter 5:2, Titus 1:7, 1 Timothy 3:1

Poimen: Shepherd/pastor – 1 Peter 5:2, Acts 20:28

Notice that in this passage found in 1 Peter 5:1-4, all three terms are used to refer to the biblical, ruling office of Elder.

*¹ So I exhort the **elders** among you, as a fellow **elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 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. ⁴ And when the chief **Shepherd** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

The term “elder or presbuteros” is used twice in verse 1. The term for “overseer or episkopos” is used as a verb in verse 2. And the term for “shepherd or poimen” is used as a verb in verse 2 with reference to shepherding the flock of God. It is also used to refer to Jesus as the Chief Shepherd in verse 4. Thus, in one passage speaking of elders, all three words are used to describe the office and function of this leadership role within the church.

The Plurality of Elders

The New Testament pattern always has a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17; Titus 1:5). There is never an instance of a lone elder in the New Testament. Of the 18 references to elders in the New Testament, 15 of them are in the plural.

The Function of Elders

The Bible indicates that different elders carried on different functions. Specific instructions are given to elders in several areas:

Governing (1 Timothy 5:17)

Shepherding (1 Peter 5:2-5)

Preaching/Teaching (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Timothy 5:17)

In the early church, it seems there was a plurality of elders, also called “bishops” or “overseers.” It is the elders who lead the church and are responsible for teaching the Word of God and guiding, admonishing, and exhorting the people of God. The man who fills the duties of a pastor/teacher is actually one of the elders.

The term ‘pastor’ refers to the shepherd role given to some elders. Although it only occurs once as a title (Ephesians 4:11), it occurs elsewhere as a verb. Elders are urged to ‘shepherd’ the flock of God (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2).

While the teaching pastor shares responsibility for spiritual oversight with the other elders of a church, Paul indicates the position carries an added obligation. “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). Thus, the pastor and other elders are equal in authority but not in duty.

An overseer or ‘bishop’ is another title used to describe a different function of elders. The term speaks of their leadership function and its inherent authority.

The New Testament does not appear to support or require an extended church hierarchy covering large geographical areas. No elder in the New Testament was ever given authority over another elder, and each local assembly had its own elders/bishops/pastors. Even the modern distinction between clergy and laity is a product of church tradition without scriptural basis (the apostles saw themselves as “fellow workers” with us, Philemon 1:24). No one except the apostles ever exercised authority over more than one church, and, after the first century, there were no official apostles that were called by and instructed by Jesus.

The Qualifications of Elders

When Paul lists the qualifications of elders, he combines requirements concerning character traits and heart attitudes with requirements that demonstrate committed and faithful Christian leadership (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). These high standards for qualification as an elder, combined with the accountability of plural elders found throughout the New Testament, create a dual protection against abuse of power or other defects of leadership.

The Meaning of “Husband of One Wife”

This phrase, like the rest of the passage, refers to a person’s character and reputation as it now exists.

It means he should be a “one-woman-man.”

This does not require that an elder be married. However, his character and his treatment of women in particular should be above reproach.

It does not necessarily forbid divorced individuals from serving as elders. If it did, then, by the same reasoning, it would disqualify anyone who has ever failed in any area of his life.

It would seem to exclude practicing polygamists from leadership positions as well as anyone whose reputation includes inappropriate attention to women.

Deacon

The office of deacon began with the recognition of the first set of deacons in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons are mentioned again in contexts which make it clear that the office became a regular part of newly established churches all over the world (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The latter passage lists the qualifications of deacons.

Apparently, deacons were tasked with certain administrative duties. This seems to be the reason for the institution of the office in Acts 6 where the distribution of food for the care of widows was in view.

The term deacon is used to denote the formal office in the church. However, it is also used in an informal sense to refer to those who serve the church in various ways, such as Phoebe the deaconess (Romans 16:1-2).

Some suggest that this reference means women may also hold the office of deacon, or that there is an office of deaconess.

Take a few minutes to pause this recording and read 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 3:8-13 looking for the biblical qualifications of elders and deacons. Record your observations in the box in your handout. Based on these qualifications, how might you summarize what God is looking for in the leaders of His church? When you have completed this activity you may restart the audio.

Welcome back!

Based on the review of the biblical qualifications for elders and deacons, it appears that God seems most concerned about the character of the leaders within the church and less about their skills and abilities. This does not mean that skills and abilities are not important and that you should not look for leaders who strive for excellence in what they do. But the fact that all but two of the qualifications deal with character issues over competencies and skills, communicates that God is most concerned about the heart and character of a leader first. This would align with what God told Samuel when he was looking to anoint the king to replace Saul. *“God does not look at things the way man does. Man looks at the outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).”*

Elder Qualifications:			Deacon/Deaconess Qualifications:	
Above reproach	Hospitable	Good reputation	Dignified	Faithful
One woman man	Not drunkard	Not new believer	Honest	Sober-minded
Able to teach	Not violent	Gentle/Meek	Not drunkard	
Temperate	Not quarrelsome		Not greedy	
Self-controlled	Not lover of money		Sound doctrine/Strong faith	
Respectable	Manage family well		Tested	

Other Offices

Many churches today include other officers (treasurer, moderator, trustees, etc.). Are these unbiblical offices? While it is true that there is no specific mention of them in the New Testament, that does not mean they are unbiblical. The example of Acts 6 shows us that when the church faced a practical problem hindering the ministry, leaders organized and set up a new office to meet the need. Churches today have freedom to do the same.

Questions

If you are currently an officer in your church or would like to be one, does the pattern of your life match the biblical qualifications?

If you have had a part in the process of selecting church leaders, have you tended to emphasize character traits and spiritual qualifications talked about in Scripture, or have you emphasized worldly leadership qualifications?

What other kinds of leaders do you have in your local church?

In what way do you see church officers differently now than before this lesson?

Types of Church Government

There are at least four types of church government for local congregations.

Single elder (pastor)

This approach is commonly seen within Baptist churches among others. In this form, the pastor is seen as the only elder. He usually serves along with a group or 'board' of deacons. The amount of authority a pastor has under this system varies greatly but generally increases with the length of his tenure.

Elder- led

This type of government involves a group of elders who govern together. Pastors are part of the elder team, though with distinct pastoral functions. The lead pastor is normally the lead elder. The authority of the elders is limited by several considerations:

- They are generally elected or affirmed by the congregation.
- They frequently have limited terms, such as 3 years or 5 years, for example.
- Large decisions are sometimes reserved for the church as a whole to deliberate.
- They are subject to discipline by the congregation, if needed.

Congregational

In this type of government, all decisions are made at the congregational level. This system becomes impractical as the church grows and more decisions are required.

No government but the Holy Spirit

With this approach, all forms of government are shunned. There are no formal decision-making processes or structures. This type of governance depends on each member of the congregation being led by the Holy Spirit and coming to consensus on each decision. This form of government fails to recognize New Testament officers and is unworkable on a practical level.

Conclusions

Many types of church government have worked well in churches of different types all over the world. Each system has strengths and weaknesses. Each type functions well only if the congregation walks in obedience to Christ. The final two types seem greatly inferior to the first two since there is no structure. The single elder model seems to ignore the New Testament practice of ordaining a plurality of elders. On balance, the best type of church governance seems to be the plural elder model.

Questions

What kind of government do you practice in your local church?

How do you see its strengths and weaknesses?

What kind of church officers should be subject to the qualifications listed for an elder or deacon?

II. Church Ordinances

In this section, we will look at the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper or Communion. While both of these ordinances would seem at first glance to be utterly non-controversial, there has been a great deal of controversy in church history concerning both. Instead of building the unity of the body, disputes in these areas have sometimes caused division. It need not be so. We will look at the meaning and mode of baptism, as well as the meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper. Along the way, we will look at alternate views of each of these ordinances and consider what our attitude should be concerning churches with different practices.

A. The Meaning and Mode of Baptism

The primary mode of water baptism practiced and taught in the New Testament appears to be immersion.

The meaning of baptism is that it is a public and symbolic picture of a person being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). It is a picture of our old unregenerate life coming to an end in death. The picture continues with our resurrection to new life in Christ. These events occur at the point of salvation. Baptism is a public picture of these events. As a secondary meaning, baptism also pictures cleansing (I Peter 3:21)

The meaning seems to require baptism by immersion (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). No other mode quite fits the meaning.

The Greek word "baptize" actually means "to immerse."

Aligns with several New Testament passages (Mark 1:5, 10; John 3:23; Acts 8:36-39).

The Subjects of Baptism

Baptism is often called "believer's baptism" because it pictures the events that occur when a person first believes and is converted. It is not designed for infants, or a person who is not making a credible profession of faith in Christ alone for salvation. The biblical examples uniformly indicate that baptism was administered to those making a profession of faith (Acts 8:36-38)

The practice of infant baptism is not clearly articulated in the Bible.

Baptism does not replace the symbolism of circumcision which carried an entirely different meaning and was only for males.

Nor is baptism a necessary part of Christian salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith alone. Baptism is merely a picture of what has taken place spiritually in the life of a believer.

How old should a child be before undergoing baptism? Since, in the New Testament, water baptism is an expression of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, it would seem that a child needs to be old enough to believe and understand that decision he or she has made. This age varies with each child.

The Effect of Baptism

Baptism provides many spiritual blessings, including:

- The blessing of God's favor which comes with all obedience.
- The joy that comes with one's public profession of faith.
- The reassurance of having a clear physical picture of dying and rising with Christ and of washing away sins.
- The accountability of being a publicly known Christian within a local church.
- The strengthening of faith for those baptized and all who are witnesses.

The Necessity of Baptism

Baptism was commanded both by Jesus (Matthew 28:19) and the apostles (Acts 2:38). These commands alone make it a necessary part of our obedient response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, we must emphasize that, while baptism is an important step of obedience and a public testimony, it is not necessary to true salvation (Luke 23:43).

Who can baptize?

Must baptism be carried out by pastors only? The Scripture places no restrictions on the person doing the baptizing. Indeed, the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-10) seems to argue that baptism can be carried out by any believer. Two practical matters suggest themselves:

Since baptism is a sign of new life in Christ, it seems appropriate that it should be carried out by someone who is a believer.

Baptism pictures new spiritual life. It identifies one with Christ and therefore with his church. As a practical matter, it seems appropriate that, when possible, baptism should be carried out in the presence of the church and led by someone approved by church leaders.

Questions

Have you been baptized? How did that impact your life?

B. The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is so called because it began with Jesus celebrating Passover with his disciples. He broke bread and offered wine, explaining that they were symbolic of his body and blood (Matthew 26:26-29).

Meaning of the Lord's Supper

The meaning of the Lord's Supper is rich and profound.

Christ's death

The Lord's Supper powerfully illustrates the death of Christ. The broken bread pictures the devastating effects of crucifixion on Jesus' physical body. The cup of wine is a picture of him pouring out his life blood. Thus, this ceremony pictures the Lord's death (I Corinthians 11:26).

Our participation in the benefits of Christ's death

As we eat and drink these symbols in the Lord's Supper, it symbolizes that we have received the benefits of the Lord's death (Matthew 26:26).

Spiritual nourishment

While the bread and wine involved in the Lord's Supper offer some small amount of physical nourishment, they are designed to picture Jesus' death, which nourishes our souls (John 6:53-57).

The unity of believers

When believers participate in the Lord's Supper together, they give a powerful sign of their unity (I Corinthians 10:17). We have received the benefits of Christ's death along with all other believers and are thus bound together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christ affirms his love for me

The fact that I am invited by Christ to take part in the Lord's Supper is a powerful affirmation and reassurance that Jesus loves me personally.

I affirm my faith in Christ

By taking the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of our faith in Christ in two ways. First, it is a reminder of Christ's death for our sin. It is important, therefore, that we examine ourselves before participating (I Corinthians 11:28). Second, since the very symbols of his death also picture spiritual nourishment for believers, we proclaim that we have received life as a result of Jesus' death.

Participants in the Lord's Supper

Most churches agree that, because of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, only believers in Christ should participate.

Before a believer takes part in the Lord's Supper, they should examine themselves as to their obedience to Christ (I Corinthians 11:27-30).

Carelessness about sin is highly disrespectful of Christ's sacrifice which paid for that sin. For the same reason, we should examine ourselves before entering into ANY time of worship (Matthew 5:23-24).

Practical questions about the Lord's Supper

Who should administer the Lord's Supper?

The Bible places no restriction on who can administer this ordinance. It seems reasonable and prudent that it should be administered by someone who is respected as leader in the church.

How often should the Lord's Supper be taken?

The Scriptures are silent on this question merely commanding that it be done regularly (I Corinthians 11:26). Historically many churches have celebrated the Lord's Supper weekly during worship. However, other churches have done so less often, once-per-month being a common interval.

Should the Lord's Supper be taken by those who are not members of the church in which it is being served?

While different churches differ on this question, there is no direct New Testament teaching which commands that the Lord's Table be restricted beyond the parameters already discussed. A person should be a believer living in good conscience as one obedient to Christ

Church Ordinances Summary

The practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper are important mile markers in our spiritual journey. They are both steps of obedience. Both convey spiritual benefit to those who participate. We should take these things very seriously but should never be arrogant or

dismissive either in our practice of the ordinances or in our thoughts toward others who have different opinions.

III. The Church – Its Worship

Churches exist to worship. It is the most common activity of any church. In this lesson we will review the definition and purpose of worship. We will also consider its results in our lives and its eternal value. Rediscovering the biblical purposes and outcomes of worship can lead to renewal in the spiritual life of any church.

Definition and Purpose of Worship

“Worship is the activity of glorifying God in his presence with our voices and hearts” (Grudem, Systematic Theology, 1994). Several aspects of this definition are note-worthy:

The definition provides the purpose of worship which is to bring glory to God in the presence of the entire spiritual realm.

Worship is an activity. Nature glorifies God naturally (Psalm 19:1). However, in worship we have the unique opportunity of glorifying God *by choice!* This is glorifying God on a much higher level.

Worship occurs “in his presence.” This implies a gathering in a setting where we each understand the special presence of God in that place at that time. (Matthew 18:20).

“Voices...hearts.” Worship is corporate, not merely individual. In corporate worship, the very unity of believers lifting their voices and hearts to God glorifies him (Psalm 133). Thus, unified worship is a powerful testimony to the power of the cross.

Questions

Can worship be individual?

Have we fulfilled the entire purpose of worship by worshipping individually?

In your experience what things interfere with a strong sense of God’s presence in worship?

In your experience, what things interfere with unity in worship?

Results of Genuine Worship

Several desirable ends occur when we genuinely worship God together.

We delight in God

God created man to glorify him *as we take delight in him* (Psalm 16:11; 73:25). The early church enjoyed much joy in worship (Acts 2:46). This joy is a foretaste of worship in heaven (Revelation 4:8-11).

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

God delights in us

God also takes delight in his created beings (Zephaniah 3:17). Corporate worship allows God to do just that.

"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

We draw near to God

In the New Testament era, believers can draw near to God in ways Old Covenant era believers could only imagine (Hebrews 9:1-7). Because of Christ's sacrifice, we can worship with true hearts in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22).

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

Because of Christ, our approach to God is no longer a forbidding, terrifying experience, but rather an inviting one.

God draws near to us

James tells us that when we draw near to God, he draws near to us (James 4:8). God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). The church worships with the assurance that when we humbly draw near to God, he responds by drawing near to us. Such humility is both an individual and a corporate discipline.

God ministers to us

When we worship, we learn from the Word of God and are strengthened (Hebrews 10:24-25).

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

This is both a corporate and individual result of worship (I Peter 2:5; Hebrews 4:16).

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The Lord’s enemies flee

When Israel went into battle singing praises to God (2 Chronicles 20:21- 22), God’s enemies were defeated. Similarly, when we sing genuine praises to God in worship, we can expect that God will do battle against demonic forces opposing the gospel.

Unbelievers know they are in God’ s presence

While evangelism is not the main purpose of worship, Paul urges Christians to consider the presence of unsaved people and speak in ways that can be understood. Then God can use our words in the hearts of believers and unbelievers alike (I Cor. 14:23-25).

The Eternal Value of Genuine Worship

When Paul urges believers to use their time wisely since the days are evil, he goes on to tell them that their lives should be characterized by genuine worship (Ephesians 5:17-20). The proper use of our limited time on earth should include deliberate praise to God and encouragement to one another. Since God is eternal, he will treasure our praise forever.

Since worship is a spiritual matter, it cannot be generated merely by careful planning and talented execution. Preparation for genuine worship must be done in the spiritual realm.

There should be much prayer by leaders and participants in worship alike (I Thessalonians 5:17).

The congregation must also learn what the Bible teaches concerning true worship (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Worship should occur in a context of reconciliation with God and others. There must be humble unity in order for worship to be genuine (I John 4:20).

Worship is most genuine when worshippers are striving toward holiness (Hebrews 12:14).

Questions

Have you ever considered how being in individual conflict with someone else can affect the entire church's ability to engage in genuine worship?

Do you think there is enough genuine worship in your life each week?

If not, what are the hindrances to such worship?

Church Worship Summary

Genuine worship has great value in our lives and in bringing eternal glory to God. It requires spiritual preparation to cultivate humble unity, and hunger for personal holiness and closeness to God. It is the responsibility of church leaders and of every worshipper to contribute to corporate worship.

This concludes our three lessons on the doctrine of the Church.

Lesson 3: The Church – Its Nature and Purpose of the Church

Lesson 4: The Church – Its Purity, Unity, and Power

Lesson 5: The Church – Its Governance, Ordinances, and Worship

When we continue with Lessons 6 and 7, we will discuss the doctrine of the End Times or Eschatology.