

# What is Reformed Church Government

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**Bible Text:** Exodus 18:13-27; Deuteronomy 1:9-18

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Exodus 18:13-27. Let's listen to the word of the Lord.

13 The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. 14 When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" 15 And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God; 16 when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." 17 Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. 19 Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, 20 and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. 21 Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. 22 And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. 23 If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace." 24 So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. 25 Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. 26 And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. 27 Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

Then turning the page over to Deuteronomy 1:9-18, Moses speaking says,

9 "At that time I said to you, 'I am not able to bear you by myself. 10 The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven. 11 May the LORD, the God of your fathers, make you a thousand times as many as you are and bless you, as he has promised you! 12 How can I bear by myself the weight and burden of you and your strife? 13 Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads.' 14 And you answered me, 'The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.' 15 So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officers, throughout your tribes. 16 And I charged your judges at that time, 'Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him. 17 You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.' 18 And I commanded you at that time all the things that you should do."

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray and ask for his blessing.

*Father, we thank you for this word. We pray that you would lead us in the speaking and the hearing of this word to come to understand better the ways that you govern us, the way in which you ensure that justice and mercy are done, the ways in which you ensure the Gospel is preached and received by your people. Grant, Lord God, that hearing these things that we would do them as well, that Christ would be lifted up and exalted among us. We pray these things, Jesus, in your name. Amen.*

The question before us tonight is the question of governance, how are God's people to be governed? What does it mean to be a Reformed person, a Presbyterian? How do we defend that? How do we explain that from Scripture? So I actually kind of want to flip the outline that you have. I actually want to begin at the end. I want you to turn with me to the conclusion and I want us to think for a minute about who it is that governs all of us. We can talk if we want to about what we understand the Scriptures to be saying about the different methods of church government and we'll look at that in a moment but everybody has to begin with the fact that we are under the rulership of God, specifically it is Christ who is King over us, and the rulership that Christ extends over us and has over us, sets the pattern and sets the mark for how it is the churches are to be governing themselves both in terms of character and quality, but also even in terms of method and consistency.

So remember, first of all, that Christ is over all. Christ is the Shepherd. And so here you have the idea that the rulership of Christ is compared to that of a shepherd and a shepherd is good. He leads his sheep to safety in the pasture. He provides for them. They don't exist for him to be cruel to, but rather they are to be the recipients of his kindness and care. And particularly with Jesus as the Shepherd, you find one who lays down his life for

his own people. He declares, "I am the good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." As our Shepherd, you can think of Psalm 23, you have one who defends and puts his life on the line to protect those that are his own. Revelation 7:17 speaks of Jesus in heaven and speaks to his role even there and his identity as the Shepherd, "For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." This tells us of the compassion and of the mercy of Christ as our Shepherd, of Christ as our leader.

He is also King so he makes decrees, he makes rules, he defends and protects his people. He determines who the enemies of his people are and acts upon them in order that his people might be safe. Again from Revelation 19:11-16, "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

Christ is our Shepherd. Christ is also our King. We think in terms of the comfort that we have from a shepherd, we are also to think of Christ in terms of the strength that he has to protect and defend his own. The mercy that we receive from him is the other side of the coin from the wrath that he brings against those who defy him and who would do harm to his people.

Christ is also called the righteous branch and this is from Isaiah 11:1-8, and here it speaks more of the character qualities of Jesus. Not so much his identity and his rule but what kind of person he is who rules over us and protects us and defends us. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den."

Look at how Jesus is described to us and what the result of his rule will be. He doesn't judge by mere sight like we are bound to. He doesn't judge by mere hearing like we often

are bound to. But he knows the hearts and the minds of men and he judges with perfect righteousness. You and I will do the best that we can but we don't have the wisdom of Christ, we don't have the knowledge of Christ, and so we are bound to make mistakes in whatever our task might be. But Jesus is perfect in all of his ways. And there are more things that we can say about Christ the King, about Christ or the Shepherd, about Christ the Righteous One, but as we begin to look at this topic of church governance, we need to recognize who it is that rules over us and our need to obey him in all things, our need to submit ourselves to his law and to his rule because he is good and kind and the things he commands of us as people living in his kingdom, as citizens of his kingdom, and the things he commands of us to submit to, to those who he appoints over us are spoken to and given to us by him that we might know his continued safety and blessing.

Now, there are a number of different ways to explain or to categorize the various systems of church governance, how the church has organized itself, how do they see the work done, how do they deal with matters of doctrine and teaching and discipline. Every human society has certain orders and rules that it follows, certain lines of authority, certain commandments that it keeps, and the church is no different than all those things. There are three different systems that you can put together and there are variations with each one and some would even argue for two or three other systems of church government, but I think they can be summed up in three.

The first is the idea of episcopacy. The Episcopal Church comes to mind. The Catholic Church comes to mind. This is a system of church governance where bishops are seen to rule over the congregations of a particular area, and these bishops are generally under the supervision of others, an Archbishop. In Catholicism, the Pope is the great Bishop or the final arbiter. Now, there might be lay councils at local and diocesan levels, but they operate under the authority of the presiding Bishop. So there is very much a hierarchy here and one person who has power, final say over all, and although it varies in how this works out, you have Roman Catholicism, you have the Episcopal, the Anglican church included in this, the Methodists churches function in this way as well. One practical matter is congregations don't choose their own pastors, they are chosen by them, by the bishops, and if a congregation likes someone, they can't keep him as long as they want; and if he likes them, he cannot stay with them as long as he wants. Those decisions are made by those over them. So it's very much a top down kind of authority and system that is being worked at there.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is independence or congregationalism. So the church is being organized and ordered together under the rule of bishops and one who is over all the bishops. Each local congregation is autonomous and independent. It's not tied in organically with any other group but itself and so they generally have elected leadership but may also have a person who is just by strength of power and charisma, rules and runs over the church himself. The various churches and congregations may gather together in associations or groupings but ultimately each congregation has ultimate authority over its own affairs. The nondenominational churches, the mega churches function like this. The Baptist churches, although they do have associations, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Reformed Baptist Association, each congregation is still

essentially independent and the group as a whole cannot act on the behalf of anyone within that congregation. They can remove the congregation from their association but they can do nothing beyond that.

Now in the middle, and I think in the wise middle, is Presbyterianism. In Presbyterianism, each local congregation elects its own elders and pastors and deacons, their own leaders, their own officers. This is done under the supervision of the Presbytery, which is the geographical gathering of churches in a particular area. The pastors and elders elected are members of the Presbytery and the Presbytery is the geographical gathering of the churches, and this Presbytery gathers together when called to deal with a specific matter at regular set times to deal with doctrinal and disciplinary, judicial, evangelistic, financial or other matters that come up. So you begin with a local congregation and then you have that local congregation part of a larger group of churches, the Presbytery, and then the Presbyteries together form what could be called a synod or a general assembly. These are usually national, although they could be international depending on the geography of the cultures involved here, and the synod then deals with similar matters as the Presbytery does in terms of doctrinal and judicial matters, but it's set up really as a court of appeals, on the one hand, so that problems that the congregations cannot meet locally can be dealt with by the Presbytery, and if the Presbytery is not able to do that, it can then go to the synod. It's really the best of all worlds and I think it's the best biblical explanation and putting together of a system of church government. Power resides in the congregations but that power, then, is given to elders and pastors and exercised in Presbyteries so that there is a back and forth in all of this. There is also in the Reformed Presbyterian church and in Presbyterian churches, while the synod is the highest authority in the church, the synods are bound by the governing documents of the church. So when men are being faithful to their calling, they cannot go against those things unless those things are changed and those changes happen by the will of the people essentially.

Now in that regard, going back to why I read Exodus and Deuteronomy, I think Presbyterianism is the way in which we see the lessons of Exodus and Deuteronomy most clearly laid out for us. Moses is leading a million or so people. His father-in-law, Jethro, comes to visit with him and sees what's going on and is somewhat aghast and shocked by what Moses is attempting to do. Moses is not trying to garner power for himself, he's not trying to make a name for himself, the Scriptures later say that Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth, but Moses has not thought about how he can effectively govern all of this. So his father-in-law who last saw Moses as a shepherd, has some advice for his son-in-law and says, "Moses, this is too much for you. I understand that you are called to be a prophet, I understand that you are to communicate the law of God to these people and so you must do that, but the rest of this task is too great for you so listen to me and if what I'm saying is of God, then do it, appoint leaders to work under you to deal with lesser matters and reserve the greater matters that they can't come to a conclusion on for yourself. In this way, justice can be done and matters can be organized and people can be guided. It's too great for one man and one man is not sufficient for the people. So choose leaders of tens and fifties and hundreds and thousands." So this is a population of a million or so people so you're talking about a system of courts, of graded

counsel and rulership. So there are ways of appeal and ways of spreading out the workload and dealing with things simply on a simple level, and as things get more complex, taking them to a higher level where there will be more capable men, and finally bringing to Moses himself and Moses directed by God will deal with the most difficult matters.

Now, what's interesting is that if you read the Exodus passage alone, you think that Moses chooses the leaders, that Moses goes out and finds the men who are capable, but when you read in Deuteronomy how this is actually put together, Moses says to the nation, "You choose your leaders. You choose the ones that you want to have over you, and having chosen them, I will appoint them to that." And that's what Presbyterianism does. Congregations choose their own elders, they choose their own pastors, and when a ruling elder is elected, it's the Session that ordains and installs him to that office. And when a pastor is called, when a teaching elder is called, it's called by the congregation and the Presbytery, who we understand to be given particular charge over the doctrine of the congregation and of the church as a whole, is the one who comes to examine the teaching elder, the minister, and installs him with the congregation and the elders of that church and the elders of that Presbytery all involved in that situation. The people choose and the Presbytery appoints. The people choose and the Session installs in the case of a ruling elder.

So in that way it's the best of both worlds. It's a balanced kind of system of government because we know what people can do. We know how prone it is and even in our system, to have men with particular charisma or particular bad intent, to take control and to take charge and to rule with iron hands over others. We know, on the other hand, those who are overly timid and overly weak and how by their vacillation, by their unwillingness to deal with certain issues, churches can find themselves in trouble. And so at one level, any system of church government is only as good as the quality and the character of the men who are involved in that, but when you have men of equal character, of godly character, I think Presbyterianism holds up best as perfecting the role of the church and its governance and offering the most protection for the people and the most clear way of expressing and furthering the Gospel of Christ.

Now, looking at it locally again, each congregation has its own leaders. The elders are two in our denomination, we have teaching and ruling elders. Some churches have three offices: they have ministers and ruling elders and deacons. We are two office: teaching and ruling elders are one office, deacons are the second office.

We won't look through this but you're aware of the qualifications that elders are called to in 1 Timothy 3 and 1 Peter 5 and Titus 1. These are men not so much of brilliance in intellect but of solid moral character. These are men who are trustworthy. These are men who are humble. These are men who are simply good men, devoted to Christ and following after him. They have proven themselves over time in the lives of their families in their relationships with others. And they are given responsibilities, then, as leaders, as mature men who are proven to rule over the church; to guard the church from error, from heresy; to discipline the church; to take an account of those who are doing badly and to

come alongside of them and to encourage them and direct them in the way that they ought to go. They are called to do this selflessly without thought for personal gain or ambition but to pour themselves out for their people as Christ has done so as well. Teaching elders particularly, have the additional charge of holding fast to the word of God; of making sure the Gospel is preached and preached well; that heresy and false teaching is kept out of the church. And they do this in consultation with the ruling elders so the men are working together like this.

Presbyterianism also has deacons and their qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6. And these are men who are called to see that the church's physical needs are cared for. And when I say that, you might think of the church building as primary but that's really a secondary issue because when you look at the first deacons who were called and put in this office, their job is to make sure that people are fed. There has been a breakdown in communication somehow and it comes to the fore in Acts 6. The Greek widows living in Jerusalem who are Jews but come from a Greek background, there are Jewish widows who come from a Jewish background, and the daily distribution of food, the Greek widows are somehow being overlooked. The matter comes to the attention of the apostles and the apostles say, "Well, we have to deal with this but our first priority is teaching the Gospel and praying for the will of God and praying for the church." So they say to the church, "Choose for yourself men who are of good character and they will take care of this." That is the first work of the deacons, to look out for the physical well-being of the members of the church. And then as a consequence of that also in our time and place, also dealing with financial matters, also dealing with property issues to make sure the place the church meets is safe and accessible to all and kept in good order.

Note that these leaders are all elected by the congregation and this is in reference to Deuteronomy 1:9-18. They are not appointed by somebody in power. They are elected by the congregation and then approved by those already and installed by those already in office for this. These leaders are ordained by the other leaders. So Moses puts and appoints the men the congregation has put to him. He appoints them to this office.

In Acts 14:23, Paul and his cohorts go about installing elders in every church that they had been at, and that may sound a bit Episcopal, like he is exercising a heavy hand and choosing for himself who he will put in place, but I think given the background of Deuteronomy, given the background that these are men who have been raised in the synagogue and have converted to Christ, raised in Judaism and come to the fullness of life and salvation in Christ, I think the idea is that Paul is putting in place those that have been elected by the congregation, those who the congregation knows are set apart. Maybe a possible indication of this idea and principle is what we see when Paul takes Timothy along with him. Now, Timothy is not ordained. We are not told when that happens. We are told that it does happen but the people speak well of Timothy and Paul, taking their recommendation, takes Timothy along with him and begins to train him for the ministry. It's not Paul acting with power or on his own hand, but listening and discerning from the church the qualities of the people that are going to rule over them and acting on that and making decisions, appointing elders.

Likewise when Paul sends Titus to Crete. Titus is sent to Crete to put in place elders for the churches that are there. I think given the Jewish background, the Old Testament input from all of this, Titus is going to choose the men that the congregations have looked to. He may not choose all the men the congregations have looked to because there is the matter of discernment. Sometimes congregations make bad choices for elders and leaders, but if the church as a whole is functioning as it ought to, even then those things will be found out and the church will be granted appropriate and godly leadership.

Now in Presbyterianism, our churches don't exist alone. We are not congregational. While we have a law of autonomy and a lot of self-governance that we exercise, we also recognize that we are a part of the body of Christ and it's not just in the theological spiritual sense of being united to Christ by faith and by the Spirit, but also a practical unity. So that practical unity is worked out in terms of Presbyteries where the churches in various geographical regions are joined together in a Presbytery, or if you're from a Dutch background you say Classes. The idea is the same. And here the elders of local congregations meet on that regional level. The elders and the pastors are members of the Presbytery. We're not told specifically that this ought to be done but it's a matter of practical wisdom and certainly it fits the example that we are given in Scripture of the ways in which the churches in the New Testament gathered together to meet to deal with issues.

The work of the Presbytery is to function as a court of appeals so matters that need to be dealt with, matters that need to be discussed, are brought there and can be progressed forward. Again, in Moses' time it was tens and fifties and hundreds and thousands so if one matter is too hard for one Session, the Session or the members of the church can appeal to the Presbytery to have these matters dealt with. In our Presbytery, we've had, and all our Presbyteries, have this practice of Session visitation and what that Presbytery visitation is Sessions. In our Presbytery, one congregation a year is visited by members, representatives of the Presbytery and so there are different ways we can do it. We send out questionnaires to the congregation, to the office bearers, and we ask questions. How do you view your Session? Are they doing a good job? Are they doing a bad job? What are the strengths of your church? What are the weaknesses of your church? What things are being addressed that need to be addressed? Are there things that are not being done? What is the quality of preaching that you have? Is there anything else you want to let us know?

Now, ideally these things are happening on a local level and so a lot of our visitations wind up affirming that the church is doing well; that the congregation and Session are working together well, the preaching is going well, there is good communication and that there is a faithfulness to the work of the church that's being exhibited by all concerned. And then even the difficulties that come up, maybe matters of discipline, maybe matters of disagreement, they're being worked through biblically. But sometimes, though, it's not. It may be that a matter comes up that's too hard for the Session to deal with, too hard for the congregation to deal with, so the Presbytery can come in and make recommendations. Not to take power away from the church, not to necessarily impose its will on the church but say, "Hey, here's what we see. How can we bring everybody together and set us on a



better path, a better way of following after God?" And if the Presbytery sees that things are seriously out of line, there is the right of authority the Presbytery has to speak to ministers to recommend that perhaps someone be removed from office for the sake of the well-being of the church. It's a back and forth matter like that.

The Presbytery can deal with doctrinal matters. The Presbytery is involved in the examination of pastoral candidates. And in our denomination, our blue book, our church government says this in chapter 6, paragraph 10, "It's the duty of the Presbytery to maintain a faithful supervision over all the congregations within its bounds and to provide for Presbyterial visitation to guard against any teaching contrary to sound doctrine and any corruption of the worship of God and to institute Presbyterial discipline when necessary. The Presbytery should give special care to vacant congregations to see that they are properly organized, that the Sessions and boards of deacons and trustees function as they should and that the ordinances are regularly maintained."

Now this is specific to our situation. Other Presbyterian bodies will say something similar but also have some differences. In all of this, we're reminded of what Paul says to the elders in Ephesus when he meets with them. "There will be wolves that arise from among you. There will be those who cause trouble." This is the warning and the encouragement that Paul gives to Timothy in dealing with false teachers. They're going to be there, you need to deal with them. And it may be that the false teachers in Ephesus need to be dealt with not just by Timothy directly but by all the churches of Ephesus coming together and speaking to the matter as the functional Presbytery would. Again, we're not sure that's actually how it worked out but this is one way in which that protection of the church from false teaching and from rapacious men is given, when the churches in the local area come together and say, "This is wrong and it needs to be addressed, it needs to be stopped, it needs to be changed."

Now, in our understanding then, too, the Presbyteries themselves are not merely independent. They, too, are part of a larger body and this is the national level, and at times even international depending upon the role of missions or the geography that's present. And our own denomination now, we have churches in Canada. We have a Japan Presbytery and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. We have a church in Santiago, Chile in South America which is a member of the RPC North America. We have church plants going on in Pakistan and in India and in other places. So there can be an international element to a national church as things develop but these churches are all together bound to further the Gospel. These churches are bound together in Presbyteries to see again further that sometimes Presbyteries can go astray and not do what they ought to do.

We have a lot of work coming up within our synod this next year as we deal with the dealings of a Presbytery with a minister and it's going to be determined by the synod as a whole, by the elders and the ministers who are there as to whether that Presbytery did what was right or did what was wrong and to uphold what is given to us. This is part of the wisdom of God in giving ways to represent people and to make sure that justice and mercy are done properly.

So the synod is the court of appeals. It deals with doctrinal matters and one indication of this is to look at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 as an indicator of this. Some argue strongly that this is a proof of the synod, of the existence of the General Assembly, and I think I can go along with that, but at the very least, you see the churches gathering together from across the world, from Turkey and Cilistia, from Jerusalem, all dealing with a vital matter of what is the Gospel. And you see the apostles even taking the place, not as apostles but as elders, as sitting down and working together as equals with all the elders who are there, seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit to come to a decision regarding the place of Judaism within the Christian church and whether one must become functionally a Jew in order to be a Christian. The church decides that matter led by the Holy Spirit, that one does not need to become a Jew to become a Christian, but there are certain things that the church ought to be sensitive to, and that decision then is sent to all the churches in the affected area.

This is what a synod can do. This is the authority that God gives the synod. Again, going back to our constitution and chapter 7, paragraph 1, this is what the synod is described in terms of its duties and responsibilities. "The synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America is the highest court of the church and is the bond of organic union, cooperation and mutual helpfulness between the Presbyteries. It is responsible for the continuing reformation of the church in maintaining the subordinate standards of the church in harmony with the scriptural truth and order. Its decisions are final but its authority is limited by its subordinate standards. Within the subordinate standards of the church, there are documents that declare confessional truth, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony, constitute the fundamental law of the church while the documents that declare the functions of the church, the Directive for Church Government, Book of Discipline and Directive for Worship, together with the actions of the synod, constitute the law and order of the church."

So even while the synod itself is the final authority, yet it, too, is submissive to the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Confession and the Catechisms. So it simply can't do what it wants to do. If it wants to change these documents, it can do so but only by a vote that's a 2/3 vote, and then that vote has to go back to the congregations and where the elders vote on that, and that requires more than a simple majority as well. So now there are checks and balances in all of this and if you have enough people who want to go awry, then frankly it doesn't matter what system of church government you have. But if you have people who are striving to be faithful, who understand the possibility of sin and arrogance and power mongering and fear among men, Presbyterianism works, I think, best to see that the rights of people before King Jesus are maintained and defended; to make sure that those who lead the church as elders and those who preach the Gospel as ministers, are equipped to do this work; and to call the church to greater obedience to Christ the King who is the Shepherd and the King and the Righteous One, whose character the church is to manifest, whose character each individual Christian is to grow up into that the work of God might be done, that the poor might find hope, the Gospel

might be preached and then might be delivered from sin and death into the mercy of Christ.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you for this word. We pray that you would fill us and bless us with your Holy Spirit. Lord, these matters can be difficult to determine sometimes and, certainly, the matters that your elders and your churches and your Presbyteries and synods have to deal with that can be difficult, but we trust, God, in the supply of your Spirit and the truth of your word to guide us and direct us to the place we ought to be. We ask that we would be submissive to your word, obedient to your word, not seeking out own will but seeking that which is good and perfect and pleasing in your sight. Lord God, we submit ourselves, once again, as your congregation, as your people, to the guidance of your holy Scripture, of your word, that we might be led by your Spirit and taught by your Spirit into all righteousness that Christ might be glorified and lifted up. We pray this, Jesus, in your name, thanking you for the forgiveness of our sins and life eternal. We pray in your name, Jesus. Amen.*