

Reformation Church, Boerne, Texas (San Antonio area)

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“It is in the local assembly or congregation of God’s people that the ordinances of Christ’s appointment for his church are regularly administered. The importance of the local congregation is therefore paramount and it is in the local congregation that the presbyterian principle must first be exemplified... In the New Testament the presbuterion is simply the elders gathered together for the discharge of those functions of government devolving upon them and no prerogative of presbytery is denied them when acting in that capacity. The presbyterian principle begins at the level of the particular flock or congregation and if for good reasons, it does not extend further than one congregation, we are not to deem it unpresbyterian. To be concrete, to that local presbytery belongs all the functions that Christ has accorded to presbytery.”

-- John Murray, "The Presbyterian Form of Church-Government"

I Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:1-9

Today is an historic day in the life of Reformation Church. It is a day of maturity. Today, for the first time, we nominate officers.

God's Word teaches us that the local church is to have at least one ordained elder. Until today, in Reformation Church, that would be me. "The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government" of the Church of Scotland, published in 1645 during the glorious Second Reformation, is Biblical and thus instructive: "For officers in a single congregation, there ought to be one at the least, both to labour in the word and doctrine, and to rule." Reformation Church is a true congregation of Christ as far as Biblical organization is concerned even though we have had just one elder. It says "one at the least." I am glad it says that, because if the standard is "the least," then I certainly qualify.

There are three forms of church government. One form is entirely invented by man and, Scripture says, will perish from the earth. Another is entirely Biblical and will last into eternity. The third is really a subset of the second, also Biblical but is infantile, the local congregation of the Lord's church in vitro, and meant to grow into the maturity of the second. If you will, it is a child of the Biblical church.

The first form, entirely invented by man, is called prelatic. Prelatic comes from the Latin word *praeferre* which means to hold in special esteem, to come before. It is where we get the English word "prefer." Applied to church government, it means the rule by a preferred hierarchy of officers. It is based upon the ancient Roman Empire model of ruling the state. There is a multiplicity of church officers, and the ruling authority descends from the highest officers downward. In prelatic government, such as Roman and Orthodox Catholic, Anglican and Episcopal, and most Lutheran and Methodist, although it is better, still the people have some but little voice, little decision-making power. For example, they cannot choose their own pastor, he -- or she -- is dictated to them. Elders don't even exist in prelatic churches, at least, elders who have any power. The power comes from the top down.

The second form, entirely Biblical, is presbyterianism. I made that word up, based on the Greek word found in the NT, presbuteros, presbyters, often translated as either elder or bishop depending upon which functions of the one office the Lord is addressing. We know it as Presbyterianism.

Presbyterianism simply means rule by elders, as distinguished by rule by a hierarchy of officers or a rule by one pastor. The Lord's church since the beginning has had presbyters. Adam was the first one. He was the presbyter, the elder, in the Garden of Eden, serving directly under the Lord.

Presbyterianism is the only mature Biblical form of church government.

The third form of church government, also entirely Biblical, but in its immature form, is congregationalism. The Lord has graciously allows His local congregations to grow while they are immature, that is, when they know of no other Biblically faithful congregation with which to join in presbyterianism. But the Bible has no record of any independent, that is, congregational, local church. However, it is His will that congregationalism is the state now of Reformation Church of Boerne, Texas. Whether it will remain that way only the Lord knows.

Make no mistake: We have grown tremendously for the past decade. Today we take a huge baby step by nominating officers. Then, when you have had the opportunity to pray about it, you will be asked to vote. Thus you, individually and corporately, face a huge responsibility. Congregations have been greatly blessed by the right officers -- and greatly damaged by the wrong ones.

Let me say a few words to those of you who might be concerned that Reformation Church might be changing into something you won't like. As far as I am able, nothing will change. Why? Because in the past 7 years since I have been your pastor there have been no situations that called for decisions by church officers. And I am fully confident that we will enjoy the Lord's blessings for many years to come.

But why have officers at all? Please turn to Titus 1:4-5, 4 To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. 5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. Acts 6:1, 1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the

Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. John Gill: "***and serve tables***; the tables of the poor, collect for them, inspect into their several cases, and circumstances, and distribute accordingly to them;" *to serve tables, diakonein trapezais* —*to be deacons to the tables diakonein*= to serve

So the first answer as to why we should have officers is that it is the Biblical model for a local church, a commandment.

Having officers also protects you. Suppose at some point someone in our church began doing something really bad and was unrepentant. Am I to judge that person? Yet today there is no one else. Shall I be some kind of dictator? If not, is that person to go on in his or her unrepentant sinful ways? If I act like a dictator and declare discipline on them, what recourse, what court of appeal do they have? That is a problem with congregationalism. No, the Lord has a remedy for that, and it is called the Session, or classis, which is made up of more than one church officer. The Session is a church court when necessary. It hears the evidence, hears the accused or his defender, hears witnesses, and renders a verdict. If the verdict is guilty the Session decides on the appropriate discipline -- the goal is not to punish, but to bring that person into repentance and back into the fellowship.

Now, suppose the Session rules against that person? He or she has a remedy if we have an appeals process set up with another church court, such as the Session of another like-minded congregation. That person can appeal to their

Session, who knows nothing of the case, and it can decide. If it rules against the appellant, and there is a higher church court, as there is in presbyterianism, that person can appeal to that higher court. In other words, presbyterianism, unlike congregationalism, protects the accused individual from the dictatorship of a pastor or the pastor's buddies.

Please now turn to I Tim.3: 1-7, where we will read the Lord's requirements for church officers. READ

The 1599 Geneva Bible notes on I Tim. 3, where the Lord gives requirements for church officers, says (my comments are set off by dashes),

"The office of (elder)...is not an idle dignity,

-- in other words, not some worldly honor, something that elevates you in the local social order, to be taken lightly.

"but a work, and that an excellent work:

-- the man is called by God to work -- the eldership and deaconate is WORK for the Lord, requires a commitment of time and of desire, and woe to those who accept it for worldly gain.

"and therefore (he) must be furnished with many virtues both at home and abroad. Therefore it is necessary before he is chosen to examine well his learning, his gifts, his abilities, and his life.

"Likewise the deacons must first be proved, that there may be a good trial of their honesty, truth, sobriety, mind void of covetousness, that they are well

instructed in the doctrine of faith, and to be short, of their good conscience and integrity." (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/geneva-study-bible/1-timothy/1-timothy-3.html>)

I Tim. 3:2-7 says that elders must be "blameless" -- meaning having no outward behavior that could legitimately bring reproach. "Blameless" does not mean sinless, for there is no sinless person except the Lord Jesus Christ. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." (I Jn. 1:10)

I Tim. 3 continues with the qualifications of elders:

"the husband of one wife," -- not the wife of one husband, or having multiple wives, etc. Not that he must be married -- that is not the intent, otherwise Paul, who was not married, would not qualify ("I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I." -- I Cor. 1:8). The requirement is that he be a man, and, if married, to have one wife, not be a polygamist.

vigilant, -- "He must be vigilant and watchful against Satan, that subtle enemy; he must watch over himself, and the souls of those who are committed to his charge, of whom having taken the *oversight*, he must improve all opportunities of doing them good."

sober, -- "temperate, moderate in all his actions, and in the use of all creature-comforts."

of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

Not given ("addicted") to wine -- Not necessarily a teetotaler, but "Not a drunkard" "Seasonable and moderate use of this, as of the other good creations of God, is not unlawful. *Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities*, said Paul to Timothy, 1 Tim. 5:23. But excess therein is shameful in all, especially in an (elder)." -- MH

no striker ("not violent") -- "one who is not quarrelsome, nor apt to use violence to any, but does every thing with mildness, love, and gentleness."

not greedy of filthy lucre -- "who does not make his ministry to (serve) any secular design or interest, who uses no mean, base, sordid ways of getting money, who is dead to the wealth of this world"

but patient, not a brawler, -- "as not a striker with his hands, so not a brawler with his tongue"

not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) -- "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (II Thes. 3:10). "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (I Tim. 5:8)

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (I Tim 3: 2-7)

"blameless, -- "not absolutely without fault, so none are, for *there is none that liveth and sinneth not*; nor altogether unblamed, this is rare and difficult.

Christ himself and his apostles were blamed, though not worthy of it...But the meaning is, He must be one who lies not under an ill character; but rather must have good report, even *from those that are without*; not grossly or scandalously guilty, so as would bring reproach upon the holy function;

the husband of one wife, **this was mentioned above**

having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly... "obedient and good, brought up in the true Christian faith, and living according to it, at least as far as the endeavours of the parents can avail.

not selfwilled, not soon angry,

not given to wine, -- "Seasonable and moderate use of this, as of the other good creations of God, is not unlawful. *Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities*, said Paul to Timothy, 1 Tim. 5:23. But excess therein is shameful in all, especially in an (elder)." -- Matthew Henry

no striker, not given to filthy lucre; (see above in I Tim. comments) **mentioned above**

But a lover of hospitality, "as an evidence that he is not given to filthy lucre, but is willing to use what he has to the best purposes, not laying up for

himself, so as to hinder charitable laying out for the good of others;"

a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; "He should be a wise steward, and one who is not rash, or foolish, or heady; but who can govern well his passions and affections...*Just* in things belonging to civil life, and moral righteousness, and equity in dealings, giving to all their due. *Holy*, in what concerns religion; one who reverences and worships God, and is of a spiritual and heavenly conversation. *Temperate*; it comes from a "For officers in a single congregation, there ought to be one at the least, both to labour in the word and doctrine, and to rule (Prov. 29:18. 1 Tim. 5:17. Heb. 13:7).word that signifies *strength*, and denotes one who has power over his appetite and affections, or, in things lawful, can, for good ends, restrain and hold them in. Nothing is more becoming a minister than such things as these, *sobriety*, *temperance*, *justice*, and *holiness* —sober in respect of himself, just and righteous towards all men, and holy towards God."

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1:6-9)

"The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government" of the Church of Scotland, published in 1645, is Biblical and thus instructive:

"As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church (2 Chron. 19:8,9,10); so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the

church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.

"For officers in a single congregation, there ought to be one at the least, both to labour in the word and doctrine, and to rule (Prov. 29:18. 1 Tim. 5:17. Heb. 13:7). --

***"It is also requisite that there should be others to join in government (1 Cor. 12:28). -- When that is possible, if the Lord has given such men, then the congregation will recognize it.

"And likewise it is requisite that there be others to take special care for the relief of the poor (Acts 6:2,30). -- The deacon(s).

"The number of each of which (elders and deacons) is to be proportioned according to the condition of the congregation.

"The scripture doth hold out deacons as distinct officers in the church (Phil. 1:1. 1 Tim. 3:8). Whose office is perpetual (1 Tim. 3:8-15. Acts 6:1,2,3,4). To whose office it belongs not to preach the word, or administer the sacraments, but to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor (Acts 6:1-4).

Here is the pertinent section from the Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church:

1. Christ who has instituted government in his church has furnished some men, beside the ministers of the Word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereto. Such officers, chosen by

the people from among their number, are to join with the ministers in the government of the church, and are properly called ruling elders.

2. Those who fill this office should be sound in the faith and of exemplary Christian life, men of wisdom and discretion, worthy of the esteem of the congregation as spiritual fathers.

3. Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor in the session, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals... They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.

"Likewise must the **deacons** be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

And let these also first be proved ; then let them use the office of a deacon , being found blameless.

Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." (I Tim. 3: 8-15)

For all officers, (and all faithful Christians, for that matter):

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (love), I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned , and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long , and is kind ; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself , is not puffed up ,

Doth not behave itself unseemly , seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked , thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things...

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is

charity." (I Cor 13:1-7, 13)

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (II Thes. 3:10).

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (I Tim. 5:8)

Please be in prayer that we all follow the Lord's leading in this important meeting, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3).