

## **Chapter XXIV: The Government and Power of the Church**

Christ is the Head of the Church and source of all its authority,

Matt. 23:10; “Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, [even] the Christ.”

John 13:13; “Ye call me, Teacher, and, Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.”

1 Cor. 12:5; “And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord.”

Eph. 1:20-23; “which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly [places], far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all.”

Eph. 4:11-12; “And he gave some [to be] apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ:”

Eph. 5:23-24. “For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, [being] himself the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so [let] the wives also [be] to their husbands in everything.”

He rules the Church, not by force, but by His Word and Spirit. All human officers in the Church are clothed with the authority of Christ and must submit to the control of His Word.

### **1. The officers of the church.**

The officers of the Church mentioned in the New Testament are of two kinds:

a. Extraordinary officers. The most important of these were the apostles. In the strictest sense this name applies only to the Twelve chosen by Jesus and Paul, but it is also given to some apostolic men,

Acts 14:4, 14; "But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. ...But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their garments, and sprang forth among the multitude, crying out."

1 Cor. 9:5-6; 2 Cor. 8:23; "Whether [any inquire] about Titus, [he is] my partner and [my] fellow-worker to you-ward, or our brethren, [they are] the messengers of the churches, [they are] the glory of Christ."

Gal. 1:19. "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother."

The apostles had certain special qualifications. They were directly called by Christ,

Gal. 1:1, "Paul, an apostle (not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead),"

saw Christ after the resurrection,

1 Cor. 9:1, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord?"

were conscious of being inspired,

1 Cor. 2:13, "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Spirit teaches; combining spiritual things with spiritual [words]."

performed miracles,

2 Cor. 12:12, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works."

and were richly blessed in their labors,

1 Cor. 9:1. The New Testament also speaks of *prophets*, men specially gifted to speak for the edification of the Church and occasionally predicting future things,

Acts 11:28; “And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius.”

Acts 13:1-2; “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was [there], prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

Acts 15:32; “And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.”

Eph. 4:11. “And he gave some [to be] apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;”

And, finally, it also mentions *evangelists*, who assisted apostles in their work,

Acts 21:8; “And on the morrow we departed, and came unto Caesarea: and entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we abode with him.”

Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5. “But be thou sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry.”

b. Ordinary officers. Frequent mention is made of *elders*, especially in the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 6, 22; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18.

Alongside of it the name ‘bishop’ was used to designate the same kind of officers, Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:1; 5:17, 19; Tit 1:5,7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2. While both names were applied to the same class of officers, the name ‘elder’ stressed their age, and the name ‘bishop’ their work as overseers. The elders were not originally *teachers*, but gradually the teaching function was connected with their office, Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2. From

1 Tim. 5:17 "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching."

it appears that some elders simply ruled, while others also taught. In addition to these the New Testament also speaks of *deacons*, Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 10, 12. The prevailing opinion is that the institution of this office is recorded in Acts 6:1-6.

## 2. The Ecclesiastical Assemblies

The Reformed Churches have a number of governing bodies. Their relation to each other is marked by a careful graduation. They are known as consistory, classis, and synod. The consistory consists of the minister and the elders of the local church; the classis, of one minister and one elder of each local church within a certain district; and the synod, of an equal number of ministers and elders from each classis.

a. The government of the local church. The government of the local church is of a representative character. The minister and the elders, chosen by the people, form a council or consistory for the government of the church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5. While the elders are chosen by the people, they do not receive their authority from the people, but directly from Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. every local church is a complete church, fully equipped to rule its own affairs. But since it affiliates with other churches on the basis of a common agreement, it is not entirely independent. The Church Order serves to guard the rights and interests of the local church, but also the collective rights and interests of the affiliated churches.

b. The Major Assemblies. When local churches affiliate to give greater expression to the unity of the Church, major assemblies, such as classes and synods become necessary. The council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15, partook of the nature of a major assembly. The immediate representatives of the people, who form the consistories, are themselves represented by a limited number in classes, and these in turn are represented in synods. Ecclesiastical assemblies should naturally deal only with church matters, matters of doctrine and morals, of church government and discipline. But even so major assemblies must limit themselves to matters which as to their nature belong to the province of a minor assembly, but for some reason cannot be settled there; and

matters which as to their nature belong to the province of a major assembly, because they pertain to the churches in general. The decisions on major assemblies are not merely advisory, but authoritative, unless they are explicitly declared to be only advisory.

### **3. The Power of the Church**

The power of the Church is spiritual, because it is given by the Holy Spirit,

Acts 20:28, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood."

is a manifestation of the power of the Spirit, John 20:22-23, pertains exclusively to believers, 1 Cor. 5:12-13, and can be exercised only in a spiritual way,

2 Cor. 10:4. "(for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds),"

It is also a purely ministerial power, which is derived from Christ and is exercised in His name. The power of the Church is threefold:

a. A dogmatic or teaching power. The Church is commissioned to guard the truth, to hand it on faithfully from generation to generation, and to defend it against all forces of unbelief, 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 Tim 1:13; Titus 1:9-11. It must preach the Word unceasingly among all the nations of the world, Isa. 3:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2; Tit 2:1-10, must draw up creeds and confessions, and must provide for the training of its future ministers,

2 Tim. 2:2. "And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

b. A governing power. God is a God of order, who desire that all things in the Church be done decently and in order, 1 Cor. 14:33, 40. For that reason He made provision for the

proper regulation of the affairs of the Church, and gave the Church power to carry the laws of Christ into effect, John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28;

1 Pet. 5:2. "Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to [the will of] God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;"

This also includes the power of discipline, Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; 1 Cor. 5:2, 7, 13; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; 1 Tim. 1:20; Titus 3:10. The purpose of discipline in the Church is twofold, namely, to carry into effect the law of Christ concerning the admission and exclusion of members, and to promote the spiritual edification of the members of the Church by securing their obedience to the laws of Christ. If there are diseased members, the Church will first seek to effect a cure, but if this fails will put away the diseased members. It deals with public sins even when there is no formal accusation, but in the case of private sins insists on the application of the rule laid down in Matt 18:15-18.

c. A power of ministry or mercy. Christ sent out His disciples, not only to preach, but also to heal all manner of diseases, Matt. 10:1,8; Luke 9:1-2; 10:9, 17. And among the early Christians there were some who had the gift of healing, 1 Cor. 12:9-10, 28, 30. Throughout history the Church provided a ministry of mercy in its care for the poor. The Lord hinted at this task in Mark 14:7, and the first Christians provided for the poor in many different situations. The early Church practiced a sort of communion of goods, so that no one lacked the necessities of life, Acts 4:34. Later on seven men were appointed to "serve the tables," that is, to provide for a more equal distribution of what was brought for the poor, Acts 6:1-6. After that deacons are repeatedly mentioned, Romans 16:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-12. Great emphasis is placed on giving or collecting for the poor, Acts 11:29; 20:35; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:13-15; 9:1, 6-7; Gal 2:10; 6:10; Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 5:10, 16; Jas 1:27; 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17.

### **To Memorize. Passages proving:**

a. That Christ is the Head of the Church:

Eph. 1:22b-23. "And He... gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all."

Col. 1:18. "And He is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence."

b. The special marks of an apostle:

1 Cor. 9:1-2. "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, yet at least I am to you; for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord."

2 Cor. 12:12. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works."

c. The office of elder or bishop:

Acts 14:23. "And when they had appointed for them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed."

1 Tim. 3:1. "Faithful is the saying, If a man seeks the office of a bishop, he desires a good work."

Titus 1:5. "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint elders in every city, as I gave thee charge."

d. The teaching function of some elders:

1 Tim. 5:17. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching."

2 Tim. 2:2. "And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

e. The office of deacon:

1 Tim. 3:10. "And let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, if they be blameless."

f. The spiritual nature of the elders' work:

Acts 20:28. "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood."

1 Pet. 5:2-3. "Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to [the will of] God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock."

g. The power of discipline:

Matt. 18:18. "Verily I say unto you, what things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

John 20:23. "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever [sins] ye retain, they are retained."

### **For Further Study:**

a. What men besides the Twelve and Paul are called apostles? Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:5-6; 2 Cor. 8:23; Gal. 1:19. "see also: Heb. 3:1, Acts 1:21 & 2:14, Rom. 16:17, Jude 1, 2 Cor. 5:16, Phil 2:25 Gk., 1 Thess 1:1 & 2:6."

b. Who are called evangelists in the Bible? Acts 21:8; 2Tim. 4:5.

c. What is the course of discipline in connection with private sins indicated in Matt. 18:15-17?



### Questions for Review:

1. Who is the Head of the Church and by what standard does He rule?
2. What extraordinary officers were there in the Church?
3. What were the characteristics of the apostles?
4. What did the prophets and the evangelists do?
5. Which were the ordinary officers?
6. What other name was used for elders?
7. When was the office of deacon instituted?
8. What ecclesiastical assemblies do we distinguish?
9. In how far is the local church independent?
10. Is there any Scripture warrant for major assemblies? Where?
11. How are they constituted, and with what matters can they deal?
12. Are their decisions merely advisory?
13. What different kinds of power has the Church? What does each include?
14. What is the purpose of Church discipline?
15. What do we understand by the ministry of mercy in the Church?