

Holy Trinity Presbyterian Church
Foundations Class
Week 8 – April 25, 2021, Why Are We Presbyterian and Why Does It Matter

Polity - The form of government of a nation, state, church, or organization.

We are part of a historical tradition that takes its name distinctly from our polity. Presbyterian. Rule by elders. From Greek presbuteros = elder.

Foundational concept: WCF 30.1. *The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.*

I. Jesus Christ is the sole head of the church

Matthew 28:18 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*

Ephesians 1:20-23 *...that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, (21) far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (22) And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, (23) which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

II. Resurrected and Ascended Christ Gives Gifts and Officers

Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (9) (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? (10) He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) (11) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (Ephesians 4:8-12; cf., Acts 20:28)

A. The "Body of Christ"

B. Three historical forms of government:

- Hierarchical
- Congregational
- Presbyterian

III. Presbyterian Government:

A. Scripture

Numbers 11:14-16 *I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. (15) If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.” (16) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.*

Joshua 8:10 *And Joshua rose early in the morning and called up the people, and they went up, he and the elders of Israel in the sight of the people of Ai.*

Acts 14:21-23 *When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, (22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. (23) And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

Acts 15:1-2 *But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (2) And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.*

Titus 1:5 *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—*

B. The Office of Elder

C. The Office of Deacon

D. The Nature of Ordination

Ordination is the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship. (*Book of Church Order* 20-2)

E. Connectional Nature

IV. Discipline

“The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual; that of the State includes the exercise of force. The constitution of the Church derives from divine revelation; the constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. They are as planets moving in concentric orbits: ‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s’” (Matthew 22:21).
(*Book of Church Order*, 6-4)

A. Broad sense

B. Restricted Sense of Judicial Process-- Vanguard Presbytery *Book of Church Order* 29-3:

The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. Its ends, insofar as it involves judicial action, are the rebuke of offences, the removal of scandal, the vindication of the honor of Christ, the promotion of the purity and general edification of the church, and the spiritual good of the offenders themselves.

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 30 (*Of Church Censures*)

Gal 6:1 *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

See: 1 Cor 5:1-11 , 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim 1:20, 1 Tim 5:19-20, Titus 3:9-11, Hebrews 12:1-14

Dewey Roberts article “The Problem with Presbyterianism Is...Presbytery”: