

# Who We Are: Presbyterian

INQUIRER'S CLASS, WEEK 3  
FOREST HILL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
MARCH 20, 2016

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## Who's Right?

- ▶ "It appears likely that there was no normative pattern of church government in the apostolic age, and that the organizational structure of the church is no essential element in the theology of the church." - George Eldon Ladd
- ▶ "It is not as much as hinted in the New Testament that the church would ever need — or indeed should ever want or tolerate — any other local leadership than that of the eldership group." - J. Alec Motyer

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## Three Major Kinds of Church Government

Hierarchical (Episcopal)	Presbyterian	Congregational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority: Archbishops &amp; Bishops</li> <li>• Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopal, Methodist, AME</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority: Elders (Presbyters)</li> <li>• Connectional (Presbytery)</li> <li>• Presbyterian</li> <li>• Reformed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authority: Members of the Congregation</li> <li>• Can be/usually are single-pastor-led</li> <li>• Some congregational churches are elder-led (non-connectional)</li> <li>• Baptist, Non-denominational, Lutheran</li> </ul>

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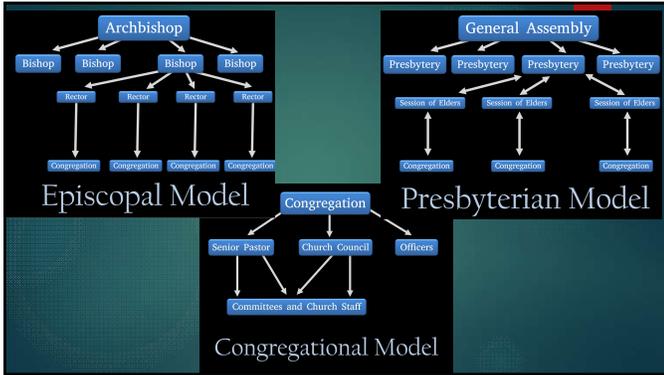
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### Biblical Support for Presbyterianism?

Source: Greg Bahnsen: "Church Government Briefly Considered" <http://opc.org/OS/html/V4/1d.html>

- ▶ There is no distinction between "elders" and "bishops" (Titus 1:5-7; Acts 20:17, 28); these represent the same office and order.
- ▶ Each congregation and center of leadership is to have a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1), not one-man rule.

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### Roles & Responsibilities of Elders

- ▶ These elders have oversight of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3) and are thus responsible to rule the congregation (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17; 1 Thes. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). They judge among the brothers (cf. 1 Cor. 6:5) and, in contrast to all the members, they do the rebuking (1 Tim. 5:20). Christ calls them to use the "keys of the kingdom" to bind and loose (Matt. 16: 19; 18: 18; John 20: 23)—these keys being the preaching of the gospel (1 John 1 :3), administering of the sacraments (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11: 23ff.), and the exercise of discipline (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-5).

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- ▶ The elders are assisted in their ministry by "deacons" who give attention to the ministry of mercy (Phil. 1:1; Acts 6:1-6; cf. 1 Tim. 3:8-13).
- ▶ The office-bearers in the church are nominated and elected by the members of the congregation (e.g. Acts 6:5-6), but must also be examined, confirmed and ordained by the present board of elders (Acts 6:6; 13: 1-3; 1 Tim. 4: 14).
- ▶ Members of the church have the right to appeal disputed matters in the congregation to their elders for resolution, and if the dispute is with those local elders, to appeal to the regional governing body (the presbytery) or, beyond that, to the whole general assembly (Acts 15). The decisions of the wider governing bodies are authoritative in all the local congregations (Acts 15:22-23, 28, 30; 16:1-5).

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## The Single-Elder-Led Congregation

- ▶ Common in many Baptist and Charismatic churches.
- ▶ Congregations have one elder, the Senior Pastor, who functions as a CEO of the church. The congregation calls and can fire the pastor, but the pastor has authority otherwise.

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## Why Single-Elder Leadership?

- ▶ **Paige Patterson:** Biblical evidence undeniably exists in support of a plurality of elders, but several factors support the ascendancy of a principal elder as the singular leader of the congregation. Those factors include:
  - ▶ 1) the general pattern in the Old and New Testaments (e.g. Moses, the judges, Peter, James the brother of Jesus);
  - ▶ 2) the pattern of the early church (e.g. John Chrysostom in Antioch and at Saint Sophia's in Constantinople, Augustine in Hippo, Jonathan Edwards in Northampton);
  - ▶ 3) influence of the synagogue on the church, including adoption by the church of the "president of the synagogue" in the form of the "pastor/elder/overseer"; and 4) the psychology of human leadership. (*Who Runs the Church*, pp. 150-52)

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## Development of Hierarchy: The Human Tendency

- ▶ Bible: Elders & Apostles \* (*Bishops and Elders – Same*)
- ▶ Early Church: Bishops (by the year 100)
- ▶ Later Early Church: Archbishops (by the year 325)
- ▶ Medieval Church: Pope (Catholic) / Patriarchs (Orthodox)

WHY? The desire to have a single person in charge and the desire for people to exercise authority over one another.

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## Elder-Led Churches: Congregational vs. Connectional

- ▶ Acts 15: Jerusalem Council
- ▶ "The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter." – Acts 15:6
- ▶ Connection to other churches provides accountability, oversight, encouragement and cooperation in ministry and mission

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## Connected from the Beginning

Donald MacLeod: "From the very beginning the church had a unified, collegial leadership extending to all its congregations. That leadership was directly involved and consulted at every critical point in the development of the emerging people of God: the reception of the Samaritan church (Acts 8:14), Peter's mission to Cornelius (Acts 11:1ff.) and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9). The idea of totally isolated, fully autonomous churches is wholly alien to the New Testament."

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## Presbytery

- ▶ A. There is a body understood as a regional church. (Galatians)
- ▶ B. The presbytery is the overseeing body of the regional church.
- ▶ C. The presbytery is responsible to care for the spiritual health and protection of its local congregations.
- ▶ D. The presbytery provides a place of appeal for the resolution of grievances and theological disputes.
- ▶ E. The presbytery is responsible for the care and training of those called to preach the gospel.
- ▶ F. The presbytery is responsible to establish new local congregations and to spread and defend the gospel in its region.

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## Origin of the Presbyterian Church

- ▶ "I am not master of myself, but must obey Him who commands me to speak plain, and to flatter no flesh upon the face of the earth." - *John Knox (ca. 1514-1572) Founder Presbyterianism*
- ▶ *John Knox got his ideas on church government from John Calvin's Geneva*
- ▶ Continental Reformed: Council (Local), Classis (Regional), Synod (National)
- ▶ 1559: John Knox returns to Scotland
- ▶ 1579: Regional Meeting First Called "Presbytery"
- ▶ 1706: Presbytery of the New World established
- ▶ 1729: Adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith (next class)

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