



Chapter 26: Of the Church

What is the church? What is the visible church and invisible church? Who is the head of the church? What power does the church have? What is church discipline? What offices are there in the church? What about church membership? What does an elder do and who can become an elder? What does a deacon do and who can become a deacon? What is the work of the pastor?

Although this chapter is the longest in the Confession, yet it will not have a long commentary, for most of the things which are asserted here could easily be proven by looking at the proof-texts that are provided.

§1 The Universal Church Consists Of The Whole Number Of The Elect

1. The **catholic** or universal church, **1** which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, **consists of the whole number of the elect**, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. **2**
 1. Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 1:22; 4:11-15; 5:23-25, 27, 29, 32; Col. 1:18, 24; Heb. 12:23^[1]
 2. Eph. 1:22; 4:11-15; 5:23-25, 27, 29, 32; Col 1:18, 24; Rev. 21:9-14

The word "catholic" means *universal* and hereby they are agreeing with the last part of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, 9. **the holy catholic Church**, the communion of saints, 10. the forgiveness of sins, 11. the resurrection of the body, 12. and the life everlasting. Amen.

Neither the Nicene Creed nor the Confession refers to the *Roman Catholic Church* in the word "catholic", but the *universal* Christian Church of Jesus Christ. This church is the Universal, throughout the globe, *invisible* church. This designation refers to true believers, who were chosen before the foundation of the world, are members of the New Covenant and not *merely* members of a *local* church. They are true believers and this is what the New Covenant consists of and this is what makes up the invisible Church, which only God knows who belongs to it. There will be professing believers in our churches, even members or on the staff, who are not true believers and thus not part of the *invisible* church, but they are part of the *visible* church.

The New Covenant consists only of believers. This is one of the major points which 1689 Federalism stresses. The New Covenant, which is wholly salvific, is only for the elect. In other words, all the member of this covenant, unlike all previous covenants, are redeemed and elect of God from eternity. All the members of the New Covenant are truly regenerate and Spirit-dwelt believers. This is seen for example from Hebrews 8:6-13 where all members of the New Covenant, from the oldest to the youngest know the LORD. Not merely know *about* Him, but truly *know Him*. Furthermore, this New Covenant is unlike the Mosaic Covenant which had members who were unbelievers and members who were believers. This New

Covenant is one which will not be broken like the Mosaic was and from whence apostasy is impossible. So basically, the Universal Church or the Invisible Church consists of the members of the New Covenant, all redeemed and elect believers throughout all ages. For more on covenant theology, I refer you to the case I tried to provide for 1689 Federalism in chapter 7 ([see here](#)).

Matthew 16:18

The Lord Jesus promised to establish His church which no power of hell could stand against. He said:

Matt. 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock **I will build my church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

It is Christ who builds His community of believers, His congregation, His church. Men do not build the church. Men may build church *buildings*, but Christ is the architect of His Church. Sadly, this is often now what this verse is remembered for As Albert Barnes noted, if “it not been that the Church of Rome has abused it [Matt 16:18, and who the rock is], and applied it to what was never intended, no other interpretation would have been sought for.”^[2] The controversy that surrounds this verse between the Protestants and Catholics lies in the fact who “this rock” is which is being referred to and the further Roman Catholic implications of this. The Roman Catholic church claims that here Christ gave Peter supreme authority over the church and raised him above all other disciples. Furthermore, they see in this the Papacy. They say that Peter was the first bishop of Rome and from him, there has been a direct succession of popes/bishops of Rome. Therefore, they see in the Pope the authority of Peter, which they understand as being the supreme on earth over the Church. The Pope, so to say, is Christ on earth.

Barnes was right, these things could not be found anywhere in the Bible, let alone in Matthew 16:18. It was not the intention of the Lord Jesus to give us here a doctrine of a single bishop of Rome who will be called the Head of the Church. There is no difficulty in identifying Peter as “this rock” which Christ was speaking of. As Keith Thompson has studied this passage and observed, “Conservative Protestant exegetical scholarship is basically unified in affirming Peter is the rock here. D. A. Carson, Craig Blomberg, Craig S. Keener as well as the late Oscar Cullmann and W. F. Albright among many dozens of others are in agreement on this point.”^[3] The difficulty lies in the fact that the Papists have read all kind of things in the words of the Lord Jesus which He never intended.

The Apostle Peter did function as the “starter” of the Church. On the day of Pentecost, it was he who first preached the Gospel to the Jews (Acts 2:14-41). Furthermore, it was also he who brought the message of salvation to the Gentiles in Acts 10. So, in a real sense, Christ did build His church on Peter's preaching and through Peter's ministry. This may also be tied to the key's given to Peter a few verses later (Matt. 16:19). But it is wrong to say that by this declaration and by this deed, now Peter is the head of the Church on earth. The passage communicates no such thing, nor is such a thing taught elsewhere in Holy Writ. The Bible teaches there is only one Head of the Church—Jesus the Christ. Most importantly, we should not ignore the occasion that caused the Lord Jesus to say such a thing about Peter. When the Lord Jesus asked who the disciples said that He is, Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Therefore, Peter should not be considered in his person alone, but also in His *confession*, which is the confession of every true Christian. The Lord Jesus, the true and only Head of the Church, built His church on the foundation of Peter among others (Eph. 2:20) and all of His people share in Peter's confession that Christ is “the Son of the living God.”

From the Scriptures, we do not see Peter as having sole authority in the Church, but as an elder shared authority with others in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the claim that in Matthew 16:19 the Lord Jesus gives unique authority to Peter to absolve sins, judge doctrinal matters and so on, is wrong because that power is given to the Church in Matthew 18:18. In Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus specifically spoke of Peter, but He did not mean *only* Peter as the next reference to this “binding and loosing” shows. Peter did receive a

key and he used it to open the door to the Gentiles as he did to the Jews (cf. Acts 14:27; 15:7). Peter opened the door to the Jews (Acts 2), to the Gentiles (Acts 10) and to the Samaritans (Acts 18). He was one of the foundation stones of the Church (Rev. 21:14). Just a few verses later (Matt. 16:23) Peter would be called “Satan”, thus this declaration of our Lord did not mean that he was to be infallible or without fault. Barnes noted here that “The whole meaning of the passage is this: “I will make you the honored instrument of making known my gospel first to Jews and Gentiles, and I will make you a firm and distinguished preacher in building my church.”^[2]

This Church of Christ, this assembly of Christ, is known for its confession of Christ as the Son of God and has its allegiance to Him and her faith rests on Him. This Church, strictly speaking, started on Pentecost by the coming of the Spirit. But, this idea of a church was not unique to the New Covenant as Israel itself is often called a church in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *qahal* is the equivalent of *ekklesia* in the Greek which is used in Matthew 16:18. Christ's Church is uniquely His and consists of His elect, beloved from eternity and drawn together in love.

For those who want to know more about the Papacy, the interpretation of Matthew 16:18 and its understanding by the early church fathers, I recommend [Dr. James White's debate vs Father Mitch Pacwa](#). It is a very insightful and respectful debate.

The Whole Number Of The Elect

The Confession claims that the Universal and Invisible Church “consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ” which undoubtedly includes believers prior to the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ's blood. But how is this the case? As we have argued and tried to show in [chapter 7](#) on the Covenant Theology, the Covenant of Grace, in 1689 Federalist understanding, is the New Covenant in promise form. It was not a *formal* covenant as the others were. The fact that all the saints, both prior to the physical coming of Christ and after the coming, are included in the Universal Church is seen in Hebrews 12:22-24. Here, the church on earth joins with the church in heaven. In worship, we come to the assembly or the Church “of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven”. John Gill commented on this passage:

the church of God, consisting of all his elect, both Jews and Gentiles, and the meeting of them together: they met together, in the infinite mind of God, from all eternity; and in Christ, their head and representative, both then and in time; and at the last day, when they are all gathered in, they will meet together personally; and a joyful meeting it will be; and a very general one, more so than the assembly of the Jews, at any of their solemn feasts, to which the apostle may have some respect; since this will consist of some of all nations, that have lived in all places, and in all ages of time^[4]

If it was the blood of Christ which saved all saints in all ages and under all the covenants and thereby they belong to Christ and His assembly. He is their Mediator and He is the Mediator of only one covenant, the New Covenant in His blood. If He stood for them before God, He stood as the Mediator of the New Covenant or the Covenant of Grace on their behalf. Therefore, they had to be members of the New Covenant or people chosen to be in the New Covenant for Christ to able to represent them. This was, in fact, the covenant which the believers under the Old Testament were called into (Heb. 9:15-17). Dr. Sam Waldron writes:

the church is the climactic earthly expression of the people of God. Thus language is frequently used which equates the church with all those in union with Christ. The church is the body and bride of Christ (Eph. 1:22; 4:11-16; 5:23-27, 29, 32; Col. 1:18, 24). Furthermore, the bride of Christ is composed in the last day of the saved from every age (Eph. 5:27; Rev. 21:9-14; note also Matt. 8:11-12; John 10:14-17; Heb. 11:39-40). Thus the church will one day be composed of all the redeemed. As the people of God, the church does consist ‘of the whole number of the elect’.^[5]

A. H. Strong defines the church as:

The church of Christ, in its largest signification, is the whole company of regenerate persons in all times and ages, in heaven and on earth (Mat. 16:18; Eph. 1:22, 23; 3:10; 5:24, 25; Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23). In this sense, the church is identical with the spiritual kingdom of God; both signify that redeemed humanity in which God in Christ exercises actual spiritual dominion (John 3:3, 5).^[6]

Later he adds, "Union with Christ is the presupposition of the church."^[7]

§2 Visible Saints

2. All persons throughout the world, **professing the faith of the gospel**, and **obedience unto God by Christ** according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and **may be called visible saints; 1** and of such **ought all particular congregations to be constituted. 2**

1. 1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 1:7-8; Acts 11:26; Matt. 16:18; 28:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-9
2. Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 2:37-42; 4:4; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 5:1-9

All Christians are saints. It's not a title special which the Pope places on some people who were "holy." Being a saint, contrary to the usual meaning of the term, does not mean being perfect, but it means being someone who is set apart by God for holy use. Everyone who professes the true faith of the Gospel may be called a saint and welcomed as a brother or sister. Obviously, some professing believers will be just that—professors of the faith, but not possessors of the faith. They are welcomed into our fellowships, receive the sacraments unbeknown to us that they're actually not true believers. We cannot look into peoples' hearts, but we must listen to what comes out of their mouths and what their conduct is. Those who participate in church fellowship, but are not true believers, will certainly have some restraints because of the preaching of God's Word. This is the case for example in 2 Peter 2:17-22 ([see here](#)). Some of them may remain professing believers until death. Some will fall away from the church and go into other religions or atheism. Some will come to true repentance and faith in Christ. But the fact is, such professing believers, should be treated as believers unless their mouth or their lives prove otherwise.

1Cor. 1:2 To the **church of God that is in Corinth**, to those **sanctified in Christ Jesus**, **called to be saints together** with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Paul writes to a local church of God which is located in Corinth, but his words apply to the universal church as well. Paul did not have special insight into who is a true believer and who is not. He took people at their word and judged from their conduct if they're true believers or not. Some were successful in deceiving him (e.g. 2Tim. 2:10, 16). He is writing to those who are sanctified in Christ. They have been set apart in Christ for God. They are made unique, not because they were unique, but God by bestowing His grace upon them has made them unique. Therefore, if they're sanctified they are to be known as those who are sanctified by the title "*saints*." They are called by God to be saints. They are called to be sanctified in Christ by the Spirit. Here we see a simple congregation, who certainly was not free of error, being unhesitatingly called saints by Paul. He did not apply this title to particular persons alone, but to all those who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" and who "call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". The same is true of the believers in Rome (Rom. 1:7). We may distinguish certain people for their work for the Church or the impact that they had, but "saint" is not the word for that, as all members of the New

§3 Christ Always Hath Had, And Ever Shall Have A Kingdom In This World

3. The purest churches under heaven are subject to **mixture and error**; **1** and some have **so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ**, but synagogues of Satan; **2** nevertheless **Christ always hath had, and ever shall have a kingdom in this world**, to the end thereof, of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name. **3**
 1. 1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1; 6:6; 11:17-19; 3 John 9-10; Rev. 2; 3
 2. Rev. 2:5 with 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; Rev. 18:2
 3. Matt. 16:18; 24:14; 28:20; Mark 4:30-32; Ps. 72:16-18; 102:28; Isa. 9:6-7; Rev. 12:17; 20:7-9

There are no perfect churches. If you find one, don't go, because *you'll* cause it to become imperfect. All churches under heaven have some mixture of error in them because of our limited knowledge and sinfulness. There are churches who want to bind their members to non-essential and unbiblical things. These churches are in error, but they may have the Gospel right. Some church may demand that everyone use a particular translation of the Bible or abstain from alcohol. Both of these are not Scriptural and thus are errors, but this does not mean that such a congregation has degenerated to the point that they're actually a synagogue of Satan. They are mistaken about some doctrines, but if they have the Gospel right, they are a true church of Christ. Many churches do not adhere to the 1689 Confession, baptize children, do not believe in Covenant Theology, reject Calvinism, but if they preach the Gospel rightly, they are still valid churches of Christ with some mixture of error and truth.

The Roman Catholic Church is an example of a degenerated synagogue of Satan which the Reformers wrote and fought against. They finally lost any title which they had of a true church when they declared the Gospel of Sola Gratia anathema in the Council of Trent in response to the Protestants:

CANON XI.-If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema.

This is the Gospel and Rome has rejected it, so how can it be a true Church of God if it rejects the Gospel of God? This is not to mention all things about Mariolatry, all kinds of non-biblical doctrines as Purgatory, priesthood, papacy, salvation by works and faith, penance and so on. All these things exclude the Roman Catholic Church from being a true Church of God. They may claim Christ, but Christ does not claim them since they are a synagogue of Satan. Furthermore, the understanding of the church between Protestants and Papists is vastly different. The conception of the Catholics is more "physical" and organizational than the spiritual conception of Protestants.

No matter these synagogues of Satan and the churches whose doctrine is mixed with truth and error, the Lord Christ, as Sovereign over all, will always have His Church on earth which consists of those who are true to Him and call upon His Name. No matter the difficulties, the Lord's word still stands fast: I will build my church, and **the gates of hell shall not prevail against it** (Matt. 16:18). No matter what Christ will have a people who are true to Him and call upon His Name. No matter how difficult things get or how severe persecution is, Christ is ever-victorious and His people are more than conquerors in Him (Rom. 8:37). The best and flourishing times of the Church, paradoxically, is in its times of persecution and difficulty. As Tertullian so long ago said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." We see the Lord Christ praying to the Father to protect us within persecution and not take us out of it. The Lord

prayed, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

§4 The Lord Jesus Christ Is The Head Of The Church

4. The **Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church**, in whom, **by the appointment of the Father**, all power for the calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; **1 neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof**, but **is that antichrist**, that **man of sin**, and **son of perdition**, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom **the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming**. **2** (Colossians 1:18; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11, 12; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-9)
1. Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:20-23; 4:11-16; 5:23-32; 1 Cor. 12:27-28; John 17:1-3; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 5:31; John 10:14-16
 2. 2 Thess 2:2-9

Christ, The Only Head

The Lord Jesus, not the Pope, is the head and cornerstone of the Church. Only the Lord Jesus is named as head of the Church, not Peter nor any other person. This is clearly seen in the prooftexts for this paragraph (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). In **Colossians 1:18** we learn that Christ is the Head over the Church, which means that He is the supreme authority over His body, the Church. He alone exercises unrestrained sovereignty and rule over His Kingdom. Matthew Poole after noticing first of all the description of Christ as Creator of the World in the previous verses, then notes:

the apostle doth here speak of him with a special reference to his church, or the new creation, whereof he shows here, (as elsewhere: See Poole on "Eph 1:22,23", with Eph 4:15, and Eph 5:23), that he is the Head and Governor, his chosen and called being the proper subjects of his special kingdom, the choice body, unto which he doth more peculiarly relate, Col 1:24, for the guiding and governing of it, he being that to it which the head is to the natural body, and more especially in the two former respects:

1. Of their union to God, which was chiefly designed and expressed in those words, **who is the beginning**, i.e. the first foundation or principle of their union to God, whereupon the first cornerstone of the church's happiness is laid, he being the beginning of the second creation, as of the first, Rev 3:14. And:
2. Of their restoration from sin and death, being brought into that first-designed happiness, which is the great intention of that union, as appears from the following expression, **the firstborn from the dead**, in a special distinction from the dead, here too of the creature, Col 1:15.^[81]

Christ, the Son of God alone deserves and has ascribed to Him this position of headship over the Church, not Peter nor the Papacy ever has this description attached to it in the Bible. Therefore, all teaching which seeks to put someone aside Christ as head is anti-Christ. In **Ephesians 1:22-23**, Christ is described as head over all the world, not only over the Church. But the interesting part is that Christ as head and sovereign *over* all things is given *to* the Church. This means that His sovereignty and headship is for the good of His body, the Church. His bride whom He loved to death, even death on a cross and redeemed her from sin. It is Christ who builds His Body by supplying His body with all the graces that are necessary for her nourishment. As a shepherd feeds his sheep, so Christ likewise feeds His sheep.

The Pope Of Rome, Antichrist

I don't agree that the Pope is **the** antichrist, but he is surely *an* antichrist with his church because they have so degenerated from the way of Christ in many ways. By denying the people the peace of the Gospel which comes through faith and grace in Christ, and not by performing good works, coming to the blasphemous Mass, giving alms, being baptized and the list goes on. But I don't believe that the Papacy is the ultimate manifestation of the antichrist (the beast, the man of sin). It was usual for the Reformers to think of the Roman Papacy as the antichrist and who can question that seeing how Rome persecuted the Reformers and was gone astray from the true gospel of Christ, that the Reformers did see it in this way. Furthermore, the actions of the Roman Church and the Papacy fitted and still fit the description of 2 Thessalonians 2. There was a period where the Popes were clearly not virtuous and good people, but openly wicked. They condemned the righteous and sought to please themselves, therefore, the description of "man of lawlessness" fitted them very well. John Gill, writing in the 18th century said:

here it intends the whole hierarchy of Rome, monks, friars, priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and especially popes, who may well be called "the man of sin", because notoriously sinful; not only sinners, but sin itself, a sink of sin, monsters of iniquity, spiritual wickednesses in high places: it is not easy to reckon up their impieties, their adulteries, incest, sodomy, rapine, murder, avarice, simony, perjury, lying, necromancy, familiarity with the devil, idolatry, witchcraft, and what not? and not only have they been guilty of the most notorious crimes themselves, but have been the patrons and encouragers of others in sin; by dispensing with the laws of God and man, by making sins to be venial, by granting indulgences and pardon for the worst of crimes, by licensing brothel houses, and countenancing all manner of wickedness; and therefore it is no wonder to hear of the following epithet,^[4]

The understanding of the Papacy and the Roman Catholic system as the antichrist, to my knowledge, is uniform among the Reformers. Calvin said on v. 3, "Paul, however, does not speak of one individual, but of a kingdom, that was to be taken possession of by Satan, that he might set up a seat of abomination in the midst of God's temple — which we see accomplished in Popery."^[9] The word antichrist both means one *against* Christ and one *in place* of Christ. The Reformers pretty much saw the Pope as claiming to be the voice and representative of Christ on earth as such a claim. He sat as head of the Roman Catholic Church and thus in a sense, in the Temple of God, and claimed to be the representative of God on earth. The claim that Popes were able to grant forgiveness of sins on behalf of God, indulgences and the way in which the Pope was revered was a confirmation in the minds of the Reformers that the Papacy was indeed "that man of sin" which Paul spoke of. We may think whatever we like about the Reformers' point of view, but I agree that the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church is **an** antichrist or manifestation of antichrist, but not **the** antichrist. They are a false church and a synagogue of Satan and the claims that they make about the Pope are for antichrist. The claim that he is the head of the Church likewise establishes him as antichrist. The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church states:

882 The *Pope*, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful." "For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."^[10]

This should be the description only of Jesus Christ, the true and only Head of the Church, and not of mere men. The claim that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ, probably confirmed in the minds of the Reformers that the Papacy was indeed the antichrist. Concerning this term, an article of GotQuestions explains:

The term "vicar" comes from the Latin word vicarius, which means "instead of." In the Catholic Church, the vicar is the representative of a higher-ranking official, with all of the same authority and power that that official has. Calling the pope the "Vicar of Christ" implies that he has the same power and authority that Christ had over the church.^[11]

Such a claim for the Pope was blasphemous and antichrist and it still is. Until Rome and the Papacy recant from these false teachings (which would include the abrogation of the Papacy) she cannot but be an antichrist. Moreover, the true Vicar of Christ is the Holy Spirit, not the Bishop of Rome (John 14:26; 16:7).

§5 The Lord Jesus Calleth Out Of The World Unto Himself

5. In the execution of this power wherewith he is so entrusted, the **Lord Jesus calleth out of the world** unto himself, **through the ministry of his word, by his Spirit**, those that are **given unto him by his Father**, **1** that they may walk before him in all the ways of obedience, which he prescribeth to them in his word. **2** Those thus called, **he commandeth to walk together in particular societies, or churches**, for their mutual edification, and the due performance of that public worship, which he requireth of them in the world. **3**

1. John 10:16, 23; 12:32, 17:2; Acts 5:31-32

2. Matt. 28:20

3. Matt. 18:15-20; Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 1:3; 3:14-16; 5:17-22

Here we see the work of the Blessed Trinity in the salvation of the elect. The Son exercises His authority in such a way so as to fulfill the eternal purpose of the Trinity. The Father gave the Son a particular people from eternity past to be His own and to be saved. Therefore, the Son after His resurrection and ascension, seated at the right hand of God possessing all power and authority in the Universe, exercises that power to own the people which the Father has given Him. Therefore, He sends His Word and Spirit so as to work faith in the hearts of the people whom the Father gave Him. The Gospel proclamation goes out to all people within its reach, but only the elect will believe because only those whom the Father has given Him. He will by His Spirit regenerate and make them willing to receive Him. The doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty is central in this Confession.

But there is a purpose in God's unconditional election, which is that we may live obedient lives before Him. He did not elect us and save us because of ourselves, but He did so that we may live for Him. Titus 2:14 says that He saved us "to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Ephesians 2:10 after giving the doctrine of election in chapter 1 and Sola Fide and Sola Gratia in vv. 8-9 of chapter two, says a goal of our salvation by grace through faith is that we would walk in works which God predestined for us. The doctrine of salvation by grace alone does not undermine obedient lives or good works, rather, after knowing our nature as the Bible describes it, the doctrine of grace alone is the hope of us walking obedient lives to the Lord and having the willingness to do His will. He commanded us all as His Church to do all that He commanded us (Matt. 28:20), therefore, we should observe His ways and walk in His commandments.

The idea of a standalone Christian is foreign to Scripture. From the earliest times, the Christians always met with a company of others. There has always been a community of believers who gather together to worship their Lord. The company of the church is a place where we corporately worship our Triune God. Hear His Word preached and proclaimed (2Tim. 4:2). See His Word in the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper which He has given us (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:42). As brothers and sisters learn to know each other and edify each other with the gifts which the Spirit has given each of us (1Cor. 12:7). The public worship of God on the Lord's Day is of utmost importance and we should strive to never be absent from

the church gather on the Lord's Day unless necessity demands so. We are not to be like those who neglect the gather of God's people, but rather as we look forward to the Lord's coming, so we long for the day where we meet Him with His people in corporate worship (Heb. 10:25).

§6 The Members Of These Churches Are Saints By Calling

6. The members of these churches are **saints by calling**, visibly **manifesting and evidencing** (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; **1** and do willingly consent to walk together, according to the appointment of Christ; **giving up themselves to the Lord, and one to another**, by the will of God, in **professed subjection to the ordinances of the Gospel. 2**
1. Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 14:22-23; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2 with verses 13-17; 1 Thess. 1:1 with vv. 2-10; Acts 2:37-42; 4:4; 5:13-14
 2. Acts 2:41-42; 5:13-14; 2 Cor. 9:13

The saints of God show themselves to be of God in the church, where they do what the Lord Jesus commands them through His Word. They have been called to be saints, i.e., set apart for the purpose of God, and thus to act like that toward each other (1Cor. 1:2; Rom. 1:7). We should willingly be eager to serve each other and to do that with joy and as service to our Savior. We should as brothers and sisters encourage each other to serve the Lord and to help each other in serving the Lord (1Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13). It is not the intention of God that believers be lone-rangers, rather, they should be in a church and thus grow in their faith and serve each other. When we show love and render loving service to each other, then the love of Christ will manifest itself amongst us. This is the mark of Christians which the Lord wants them to have (John 13:34-35).

§7 He Hath Given All That Power And Authority

7. To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his word, he hath **given all that power and authority**, which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which **he hath instituted for them to observe**; with **commands and rules for the due and right exerting, and executing** of that power. **1**
1. Matt. 18:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6-8

Power, Authority, And Worship

God has granted authority to the officers in a local church to govern their church in accordance to the Word. He has not granted absolute power and authority, but only as the paragraph says, "in any way needful for their [the churches] carrying on that order [His mind declared in His word] in worship and discipline". The Lord has not given the church freedom to invent ways of worshipping God but has given them the authority to order their worship in the way that God prescribes. This is the **Regulative Principle of Worship** which we made a case for in **chapter 22**. It is God Who in His Word reveals how He is to be worship. Man is not to add to worship elements not prescribed in His Word. The church may determine the *circumstances* of worship. These are things like how many songs should we sing, how long should the preaching be, at what time do we come to worship, do we use a beamer and such questions. What God has prescribed in His Word ought to be done and not neglected. Furthermore, no element of worship may be added other than that which God has prescribed in His all-sufficient Word.

Discipline

An important power which the Lord has given to the church is the power of discipline. This power is especially given to the leadership. This is largely spoken of in Matthew 18:15-20. The purpose of discipline is not for the sake of merely pointing false doctrine or sin, but the purpose that the sinning brother or sister may be *corrected* in their error and *come back* to repentance. Discipline is for the good of the church as a whole, so that those, for example, teaching false doctrine, may be stopped to do so. Furthermore, its purpose is to serve for the good of the erring person. It is not discipline for the sake of condemnation, but *restoration*.

The Lord Jesus taught us that this discipline first should be one-on-one (Matt. 18:15). We go to the erring or sinning brother and tell them their fault, hoping that they may come back to repentance and see their sin. But, if they refuse to listen to our correction and discipline, then we are to “take one or two others along with” us (Matt. 18:16). In this way, they would see that this is not a personal issue, but more people are actually concerned about this person. But, if the erring or sinning brother still refuses discipline, then the last step is to “tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (Matt. 18:17). If he still refuses to listen to discipline from the leadership and the church as a whole, then he is to be *excommunicated* and to be treated as an unbeliever. He is to be removed from the list of membership in the Church. The Lord promises His presence as a Judge when the Church takes such a decision. When they judge a particular matter, He is there in their midst judging the rightness or wrongness of their decision. See Matthew 18:19-20; 1 Corinthians 5:4.

Notice that throughout this discussion, implicitly, church membership is necessitated. This person at one time belonged to the church and is walking in ways contrary to healthy doctrine, therefore, the church takes it up with him. A church cannot exercise such power and authority with those who have not committed themselves to the church. A church has no power or authority over a visiting person to bring that person under discipline. But those who dedicate themselves to a particular local church at the same time accept to voluntarily submit to the leadership of the church.

Things which the New Testament says causes discipline and excommunication include:

- all kinds of sexual sins (1Cor. 5:1-5);
- false teaching (1Tim. 1:10-11, 19-20);
- those who seek divisions (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11);
- idolatry (Rev. 2:14-16),
- disobeying what Paul wrote (2Thess. 3:14-15),
- laziness and refusing to work (2Thess. 3:6-10).

Also, the list given in 1 Corinthians 5:11:

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of [1] sexual immorality or [2] greed, or is an [3] idolater, [4] reviler, [5] drunkard, or [6] swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

We also get a general principle from 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 that sins to which the death penalty applied under the Mosaic Civil Law, have excommunication applied to them in the New Covenant. Such sins include:

- false prophets (Deut. 13:5);
- idolaters (Deut. 17:2-7);
- the one disobedient to the priest or the judge (Deut. 17:12);
- a false witness (Deut. 19:19);
- a stubborn and rebellious son (Deut. 21:18-21);

- a girl who is not a virgin (Deut. 22:20-21);
- a man and a woman committing adultery (Deut. 22:22);
- a betrothed virgin and a man who had sexual intercourse (Deut. 22:23-24);
- a man who steals and sells one of his people (Deut. 24:7).

See for more on this [here](#).

This discipline when it comes to the Church should also be decided by the Church as a whole. This is in accordance with 2 Corinthians 2:6 where Paul writes of “punishment by the majority” which refers to discipline and excommunication. This is likewise in accordance with our Lord’s words in Matthew 18:17, the third step of pursuing church discipline. The church officers should, not independently of the church members, decide on the discipline and excommunication of the erring or sinning person and pronounce their judgment as a church. John Gill notes on 2 Corinthians 2:6, writing:

was inflicted by many; not by the pastor only, or by the elders or more eminent persons in the church, but by the multitude, by the whole congregation, at least *υπο των πλειονων*, "by the more"; the greater, or major part; and not by one, or a few only: in inflicting this punishment, or laying on this censure in the public manner they did, they were certainly right, and to be commended; but inasmuch as there appeared signs of true repentance, it was sufficient, it had answered the purpose for which it was inflicted, and therefore it was high time to remove it: from whence we learn, that in case of gross enormities, there ought to be a public excommunication; and that this is to be done by the vote, and with the consent of the whole church, or the major part of it; and that in process of time, when the person thus dealt with has given the church satisfaction as to the truth and genuineness of his repentance, the censure ought to be taken off and he be cordially received into the communion of the church again.^[4]

Church is an Organized Body

As we move to consider membership, elders, and deacons we come to the organizational part of the church. There is order in the church and a way in which things must be done. Concerning this, it is very beneficial to note the following quote and the biblical references from A. H. Strong:

That there was such organization is abundantly shown from (a) its stated meetings, (b) elections, and (c) officers; (d) from the designations of its ministers, together with (e) the recognized authority of the minister and of the church; (f) from its discipline, (g) contributions, (h) letters of commendation, (i) registers of widows, (j) uniform customs, and (k) ordinances; (l) from the order enjoined and observed, (m) the qualifications for membership, and (n) the common work of the whole body.

(a) *Acts 20:7*—“upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them”; *Heb. 10:25*—“not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another.”

(b) *Acts 1:23-26*—the election of Matthias; *6:5, 6*—the election of deacons.

(c) *Phil. 1:1*—“the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

(d) *Acts 20:17, 28*—“the elders of the church ... the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops[marg.: ‘overseers’].”

(e) *Mat. 18:17*—“And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican”; *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.”

(f) *1 Cor. 5:4, 5, 13*—“in the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that

the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.... Put away the wicked man from among yourselves."

(g) Rom. 15:26—"For it hath been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem"; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2—"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I [pg 895]gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collection be made when I come."

(h) Acts 18:27—"And when he was minded to pass over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him"; 2 Cor. 3:1—"Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you?"

(i) 1 Tim. 5:9—"Let none be enrolled as a widow under threescore years old"; cf. Acts 6:1—"there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."

(j) 1 Cor. 11:16—"But if any man seemeth to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."

(k) Acts 2:41—"They then that received his word were baptized"; 1 Cor. 11:23-26—"For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you"—the institution of the Lord's Supper.

(l) 1 Cor. 14:40—"let all things be done decently and in order"; Col. 2:5—"For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ."

(m) Mat. 28:19—"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"; Acts 2:47—"And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved."

(n) Phil. 2:30—"because for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death, hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me."^[12]

§8 A Particular Church Consists Of Officers And Members

8. A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of **officers** and **members**; and the officers appointed by Christ to be **chosen and set apart** by the church (so called and gathered), for the **peculiar administration of ordinances**, and execution of power or duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are bishops or elders, and deacons. **1**

1. Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1-13; Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:2

Any church has got to have officers and members, there is no church of members alone or officers alone—at least not according to the Word of God. The officers are ordained by God to maintain order in the congregation and to see to it that the proper worship of God is followed as prescribed in His Word. The officers of the church are chosen by the church. There is no outside body which determines what happens in a particular church. In Baptist (and I believe, biblical) understanding, the local church is autonomous—it is on its own. There is no higher authority above it other than her Lord. A local assembly does not have to answer to a synod, for example. The officers are said to be those who are the proper persons who may administer the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. They are those who are recognized in the church and by the church, as officers. Often, the elders will take these tasks upon themselves, but I do not believe that members may not participate in administration. Though it is wiser to let the elders who are thus ordained administer the sacraments and they may occasionally choose some members to help them in the administration.

Now we should make a brief case for church membership and the two church offices, elders and deacons.

I've been greatly helped in my understanding of the Church and Church Government by Dr. Wayne Grudem in part 6 of his Systematic Theology.

Members

I attended the current church I go to for more than 2 years until I became a member. I did not see the necessity of me becoming a member and to be honest, I was unwilling to commit myself to the congregation. I thought, if I would want to leave, then it would not be a problem. I would just stop coming. There are some people who think that church membership is something unbiblical. Where does the Bible speak of church membership? There is nothing about church membership in the Bible! These kinds of arguments sound persuasive, but they do not prove that the Bible does not teach church membership.

What we need to understand about the issue of church membership is what church membership actually entails. Basically, it entails a few things. 1) A commitment to the local body of Christ, to worship and serve there. 2) To be under the rule, care, discipline, and teaching of the elders. 3) To have a place from whence the Great Commission is to be carried out. Other points could be added, but church membership has "commitment" at its core. When a Christian becomes a member of a particular congregation, they are committing themselves to that local body. They see the need for Christians to flock together, therefore, they join themselves to a local body of Christ and seek to serve their King there. This is the place where they are nurtured and where they may minister or be ministered by others. Church membership is just that, one's commitment to the local body of Christ. When one wants to become a member of a local church, they are committing themselves to that church. There may be requirements for church membership. Most Baptist churches require that the members must be baptized, others do not think that it matters. There may be (there should be!) a confession of faith or a creed which the member would sign. This is the meaning and point of church membership. Therefore, while we readily admit that we do not have commands to become church members, yet we see church membership *presupposed* in the New Testament! How? Let's see!

Even in the early church, the church kept a record of its members. The believers were a recognizable body of 120 prior to Pentecost (Acts 1:15). How was this known? Was a list kept of who was in? What about the 3000 who were "added" on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41)? The obvious question here is, "to what they were added?" The obvious answer is: to the body of believers. They were added to the church in Jerusalem. So, the local church which began with 120 members gained 3000 more members in one day. These people came under the authority and were part of the Jerusalem church. They became committed to Christ and His body, and they showed that by their baptism. This point, in my opinion, points to the idea of church membership and there being a record kept of those who belong to the church. The church knew who belong to them and who did not. They knew who was committed and who was not. And what of the talk about summoning "the full number of the disciples" in Acts 6:2? This clearly implies that there are those who are known and registered as disciples and as such belong to the Jerusalem church.

The church is described as a body with members by Paul. Writing to the Corinthians he says, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1Cor. 12:27). In this picture and in the analogy which Paul uses throughout his discussion, there is a commitment on the part of the body members to serve each other, for the good of the body (1Cor. 12:7). There are certain functions within the body for everybody. Some are feet, hands, eyes and so on. This shows us that there are certain functions like eldership, which are not for everyone to practice. But we see here also the idea of membership and being a part of a church with a commitment to serve each other.

The Bible says to elders to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1Pet. 5:2). But, who is the flock of God? The elders are to exercise authority over the flock of God and they are to lead and rule them, but who are those? Are elders to simply exercise their rule over anyone they want, visitors as well as members, believers as well as unbelievers? Obviously not. Rather, the flock are those who have joined

themselves to the particular body of Christ and have put themselves under the authority of the shepherds in the church. In this way, they are to submit to their leaders (Heb. 13:17) and their elders should shepherd them and teach them the things of God. Through church membership, we submit to the leadership of the elders and place ourselves under their care.

Another point which supports church membership is the matter of church discipline which is an extension of the previous point. If I place myself under the leadership of the local church, then I must also accept their discipline if there is any fault within me. Through church membership, I accept the fact that I may be a subject of church discipline. But, have the elders any authority in disciplining someone who is not a member and who is not committed to the local body? Have they any authority to discipline a visitor as they do a member who has made a commitment? No, they do not. When Paul, for example, speaks of the one who is to be excommunicated he speaks of him being put **outside** of the church (1Cor. 5:12-13). He was once inside, he was once a part of the church, but now he is to be removed. He is to be put out in Satan's realm.

These considerations taken together and individually, convince me of the biblical mandate to join and commit ourselves to a local body where we are discipled. The Epistles of the New Testament are addressed to such churches which consisted of those who had committed themselves to the body of Christ Universal, but also to a local body in their city. The idea of church members, while not explicitly taught, it is assumed throughout the New Testament.

As to who may be members the answer to that is: believers. A. H. Strong writes, "They only can properly be members of the local church, who have previously become members of the church universal,—or, in other words, have become regenerate persons. Only those who have been previously united to Christ are, in the New Testament, permitted to unite with his church."^[13] As proof he points to Acts 2:47; 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 1:2. We see in these texts that those who were added to the church, who are part of a local church are called believers and saints and are saved. It is true that we are often deceived by false professors, but membership should not be extended to those whom we know are not believers. Therefore, in most Baptist church only those who have professed faith and shown that by in baptism are allowed to be members.

Elders

Elders are the leadership within the church. New Testament churches are to be led by elders. The words elder, pastor, overseer, presbyter, and bishop are all interchangeable and refer to the same church office. Dr. Waldron writes, "the office of elder or presbyter, overseer or bishop and pastor or shepherd are one and the same (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:2; Eph. 4:11)."^[14] At this point it is helpful to quote A. H. Strong on the interchangeability of those words:

That the appellations "bishop," "presbyter," and "pastor" designate the same office and order of persons, may be shown from Acts 20:28—ἐπισκόπους ποιμαίνειν [*episkopous poimainein; overseers to shepherd*] (cf. 17—πρεσβυτέρους [*presbuterous; presbyter/elder*]); Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1, 8; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 5:1, 2—πρεσβυτέρους [*presbuterous; presbyter/elder*] ... παρακαλῶ ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος [*parakalō ho sympresbyteros; I exhort as a fellow elder/presbyter*] ... ποιμάνετε ποίμνιον [*poimante poimnion, shepherd the flock*] ... ἐπισκοποῦντες [*episkopountes; exercising oversight*]...

Acts 20:28—"Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops [marg. 'overseers'], to feed [lit. 'to shepherd,' 'be pastors of'] the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood"; cf. 17—"the elders of the church" are those whom Paul addresses as bishops or overseers, and whom he exhorts to be good pastors. Phil. 1:1—"bishops and deacons"; 1 Tim. 3:1, 8—"If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.... Deacons in like manner must be grave"; Tit. 1:5, 7—"appoint elders in every city.... For the bishop must be

blameless”; 1 Pet. 5:1, 2—“The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder.... Tend [lit. ‘shepherd,’ ‘be pastors of’] the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight [acting as bishops], not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God.”^[15]

Therefore, we understand that these titles all designate the same function and office and are therefore interchangeable.

An overseer ought to be one “able to teach” (1Tim. 3:2). An elder is one who may preach and teach (1Tim. 5:17). This authority of teaching and preaching is not delegated to anyone but the elders, but it does not exclude others from preaching, even from the members in the local body (see par. 11). Furthermore, not every elder ought to preach, but rather, they are to be ones who *can* teach others in the Word of truth and as shepherds lead their flock in the right path. Some elders may not be gifted to preach on the Lord’s Day or do not feel called to do so, but they may better teach or minister to others individually. 1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of elders who “especially...labor in preaching and teaching.” This means, therefore, that there are who do not labor in preaching and teaching.

That elders have a function of leadership in the church is seen in the way they are described and in the way the church is called to treat them. First, an elder/overseer ought to manage his house well, so that he may manage the house of God well (1Tim. 3:4-5). They have the duty to take care of God’s flock (1Pet. 5:2-3; Acts 20:17, 28). But we, as members, are called to consider preaching and teaching elders “worthy of double honor” (1Tim. 5:17); to obey and submit to them (Heb. 13:17); and to subject ourselves to the elders (1Pet. 5:5). These two points show that elders have a ruling authority within and over the local church. The fact that no other office is described thus shows that only elders have a ruling authority in the church.

Another point about eldership is that the New Testament teaches a plurality of elders (e.g. Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; 1Tim. 4:14; Jas. 5:14; 1Pet. 5:1-2; Heb. 13:17). This means that a church must have a minimum of two elders. A church should never be ruled by one pastor/elder. The New Testament pattern of churches is that of a plurality of elders and deacons. This is seen in how the Apostle Paul plants churches. In Acts 14 we read:

Acts 14:21-23 When they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe] 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.

Here we see two things. (1) The ones who plant a church, appoint the elders there, in this case, it was the Apostle Paul and Barnabas. They planted the church, but they had to move on, therefore, they placed qualified people in the leadership to lead the flock of God into God’s way. (2) There is also the appointing of a *plurality of elders*. Paul and Barnabas appointed multiple elders, not just one pastor in *every church*. Any and every church which the Apostle Paul planted, there he appointed multiple elders and not a single elder/pastor. This is confirmed again in the Ephesian church, for example, in Acts 20:17. They had a plurality of elders. In Titus 1:5, Titus is directed to “appoint elders in every town” similar to what Paul himself did in Acts 14:23. A plurality of elders is to be appointed in every town and in every church. The New Testament never presents a local church lead only by one elder/pastor.

Elders are the ruling authority in the local body of Christ who have a charge to shepherd the flock of God, while on the other hand, the flock of God is called to submit to them.

Deacons

Deacons are first instituted in Acts 6. There is less in the New Testament about deacons in comparison to what it teaches about elders. The noun δῆκονος (*diakonos*) simply means "a servant" or "servant, minister, a person who renders service and help to others".^[6] The verb form of the word is used in Acts 6:2 for the word "serve." The Jewish disciples lived closely and the church helped each other. But as the church grew larger, there was a problem in the "daily distribution" of food (Acts 6:1), so, one group began to complain. Therefore, the Apostles, who were apparently in charge of this distribution or were leaders of it, did not want this issue to become a distraction to the main point of Gospel preaching. Therefore, they declared "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (Acts 6:2, there is a word here somewhere for those who compromise the Gospel and promote a "social gospel"). Serving tables is good, but the preaching of the word of God is even better and more important. Therefore, the Apostles appointed seven men to carry out this duty among whom is the first martyr of Christ, Stephen. These seven people who are to "serve tables" were to do so, while on the other hand, the Apostles "devote[d] [themselves] to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). We see right away a distinction made between the elders, which is the function of the Apostles (Apostleship is really a unique office), and the deacons. One is to labor in the ministry of the word, while the other to serve the needs of the people of God. This does not exclude deacons from evangelizing or having an opportunity to teach as Stephen does, but it does indicate that their primary function is one of serving the needs of the people. This is further confirmed when we take a look at the qualifications of deacons. In contrast to elders, there is nothing said about deacons being "able to teach" which is a confirmation of our observation from Acts 6. They are said to manage their house well as the elders were called to (1Tim. 3:12, 4), but in contrast to elders, nothing is said about them caring for God's church (1Tim. 3:5). Therefore, the office of deacons is not that of leadership as the eldership is.

There is not much said about deacons other than a small portion in Acts 6:1-7 and the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, though it may be learned from these places that the deacons are concerned with the physical needs of the church and of its members. They may have something to do with the finances of the church because of the qualification of a deacon not to be "greedy for dishonest gain" (1Tim. 3:8). A deacon is to serve the church and its members, that much I can say.

Members, Elders, and Deacons

Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To **all the saints in Christ Jesus** who are at Philippi, with the **overseers** and **deacons**:

Here we see that Paul has three categories of people in his mind. First up are the "all saints" in Philippi, second the overseers and then the deacons. This is not a list of showing who is important and who is not. But what is here interesting is that Paul describes the saints in Philippi to be **with** overseers (plural) and deacons (plural). He is writing to a congregation in Philippi (the only one at the time probably) and he describes the church as consisting of members, elders, and deacons. These are the things which we argued for above and now see in a single passage.

§9 The Way Appointed By Christ For The Calling Of Any Person

9. The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, **1** unto the **office of bishop or elder** in a church, is, that he be **chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church** itself; **2** and solemnly set apart by **fasting and prayer**, with **imposition of hands** of the eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein;

3 and of a **deacon** that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the like imposition of hands.⁴

1. Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim 3:1-13
2. Acts 6:1-7; 14:23; with Matt. 18:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13
3. 1 Tim 4:14, 5:22
4. Acts 6:1-7

Elders and deacons are to be chosen *for* the church and *by* the church. Every member participates in the ordination of new elders and deacons with prayer and fasting to discern God's will about whom He has chosen for particular tasks in the church. The church then lays hands on them as a blessing and prays for God's help for these people in their tasks. There are some qualifications for elders and deacons laid out in the New Testament, however, it is important that we not think that these are super-spiritual and special people. Rather, these qualifications should be the qualifications of any good Christian! There may be an aspect like teaching or preaching, which not everyone can do, but the rest should be common to all Christians.

Qualifications For Elders

1 Timothy		Titus	
3:2	above reproach	1:6, 7	above reproach
3:2	husband of one wife	1:6	husband of one wife
3:2	sober-minded	1:8	disciplined
3:2	self-controlled	1:8	self-controlled
3:2	respectable		—
3:2	hospitable	1:8	hospitable
3:2	able to teach	1:9	able to give instruction
3:3	not a drunkard	1:7	not ... a drunkard
3:3	not violent but gentle	1:7	not ... violent
3:3	not quarrelsome	1:7	not be arrogant or quick-tempered
3:3	not a lover of money	1:7	not ... greedy for gain
3:4-5	manage his own household well, care for God's church	1:7	God's steward
3:4	keeping his children submissive	1:6	children are believers (or "faithful"), not insubordinate
3:6	not a recent convert		—
3:7	well thought of by outsiders		—
	—	1:8	a lover of good; upright, holy ^[17]

Paul gives us two lists of qualifications for elders that are nearly identical. It is understood in Reformed Churches that the office of elder/bishop/presbyter/pastor is restricted to married men only. The qualification of "husband of one wife" makes that clear, but that's not the only point. The crucial difference between the elder and the deacon is the fact that an elder is to rule the Church and *may* preach and teach the Word, on the other hand, there is nothing said of such functions for the deacons. Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 makes clear that women are not to preach or teach the church, neither are they to exercise authority over men. This clear word, just before the qualifications of elders in chapter 3, makes clear that Paul understood the office of eldership to be exclusive to men only. Therefore, biblically speaking, there are no "women" pastors and those who claim themselves as "women" pastors do so contrary to biblical teaching. It is important to note what Paul actually says, "I do not permit a woman to teach". Paul did not think that women were stupid or were not intelligent, otherwise, he would have said, "A woman *can't* preach." His wording does not consist or concern itself with the abilities of women, rather, with the God-ordained order in the family, which is to be copied in the family of God, the church. Women may preach and teach other women and children (Titus 2:3-5), but they may not teach and preach

on the gathering of God's people where men are also present. The world can say whatever they want, but this is the God-ordained structure. Paul does not appeal to culture for this, neither does he say anything negative about a woman's abilities, rather, he goes back to Creation for his grounding of this command. To top it all, there is not a single mention of any woman elder in the New Testament, or any woman having a leadership role in the church.

I'd like to say a word about the qualification, "husband of one wife." Some have thought that this means that an elder may marry only once in his life. If, for example, he was divorced or his wife has died, he cannot marry again. I find this hard to believe. How could they get so much out of this simple qualification, which says that the elder must have only one wife *in the present*. It does not say that he should be married only once, but rather, the husband of one woman. Lest we forget, polygamy was common in the ancient world and also amongst some Jews, therefore, it is proper to make this qualification which takes us back to the monogamous ideal in Genesis 2:24. The words of Albert Barnes on 1 Timothy 3:2 are good to note:

The husband of one wife - This need not be understood as requiring that a bishop "should be" a married man, as Vigilantius, a presbyter in the church at Barcelona in the fourth century, supposed, however desirable in general it may be that a minister of the gospel should be married. But, while this interpretation is manifestly to be excluded as false, there has been much difference of opinion on the question whether the passage means that a minister should not have more than one wife at the same time, or whether it prohibits the marriage of a second wife after the death of the first. On this question, the notes of Bloomfield, Doddridge, and Macknight, may be consulted. That the former is the correct opinion, seems to me to be evident from the following considerations:

(1) It is the most obvious meaning of the language, and it would doubtless be thus understood by those to whom it was addressed. At a time when polygamy was not uncommon, to say that a man should "have but one wife" would be naturally understood as prohibiting polygamy.

(2) the marriage of a second wife, after the death of the first, is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as wrong. The marriage of a widow to a second husband is expressly declared to be proper 1Co 7:39; and it is not unfair to infer from that permission that it is equally lawful and proper for man to marry the second time. But if it is lawful for any man it is right for a minister of the gospel. No reason can be assigned against such marriages in his case, which would not be equally valid in any other. Marriage is as honorable for a minister of the gospel as for any other man (compare notes on Heb 13:4); and, as Doddridge has well remarked, "Circumstances may be so adjusted that there may be as much reason for a second marriage as for the first, and as little inconvenience of any kind may attend it."

(3) there was a special propriety in the prohibition, if understood as prohibiting polygamy. It is known that it was extensively practiced, and was not regarded as unlawful. Yet one design of the gospel was to restore the marriage relation to its primitive condition; and though it might not have seemed absolutely necessary to require of every man who came into the church to divorce his wives, if he had more than one, yet, in order to fix a brand on this irregular practice, it might have been deemed desirable to require of the ministers of the gospel that they should have but one wife. Thus the practice of polygamy would gradually come to be regarded as dishonorable and improper, and the example and influence of the ministry would tend to introduce correct views in regard to the nature of this relation. One thing is clear from this passage, that the views of the Papists in regard to the celibacy of the clergy are directly at variance with the Bible. The declaration of Paul in Heb 13:4, is, that "marriage is honorable in all;" and here it is implied that it was proper that a minister should be married. If it were not, why did not Paul prohibit it altogether? Instead of saying that it was improper that a bishop should have more than one wife, why did he not say that it was improper that he should be married at all? Would not a Romanist say so now?^[2]

The other qualifications are self-explanatory.

Qualifications For Deacons

1 Timothy 3	
3:8	dignified
3:8	not double-tonged
3:8	not addicted to much wine
3:8	not greedy for dishonest gain
3:9	clear conscience
3:10	tested
3:10	blameless
3:12	husband of one wife
3:12	managing children and household well ^[18]

As we noted in paragraph 8 on deacons ([see here](#)), there is not much said about them in the New Testament other than they are generally, by the translation of the name, servants of the church. They do not have any leadership or teaching role within the church. An interesting qualification is that they should “not greedy for dishonest gain”, which would indicate that they perhaps had to do things with finances. Paul wants trustworthy people to deal with these things. This comes also with the qualification that they are not to be “double-tonged”, which means that they should say the same things to all people. Charles J. Ellicott noted:

The deacon would have in his duties connected with the administration of the Church’s alms, and also in his more directly spiritual work, much opportunity of meeting with and talking to the various families of the flock of his Master. He must be watchful, in these visits, of his words, not suiting them to the occasion, and then unsaying in one house what he had affirmed in another. Such a grave fault—not an uncommon one—would, in the long run, deeply injure his influence abroad, and would inflict a deadly wound on his own spiritual life.^[19]

They must be an honest person who loves their neighbor and their God and is ready to serve them both in honesty, truth, and with a clear conscience.

1Tim. 3:11 ESV Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

1Tim. 3:11 YLT Women--in like manner grave, not false accusers, vigilant, faithful in all things.

Then we come to our final question concerning deacons, namely, can women be deacons? I believe they can. Some translations say “their wives,” but that is not really accurate, the genitive form is not used, but rather the accusative. Therefore, the translation of “their wives” is not literally accurate, in my opinion. The word “women” is better suited here. There are three reasons why I think that women may serve as deacons, but not as elders.

1) In the qualification of elders, who have a leadership role within the church, there is nothing said about their wives. Clearly, the elders are much important in authority and as the face of the church to the outside world, but there is not a syllable said about their wives. Therefore, it seems strange to me that Paul would place an important qualification that the wives of deacons should be good Christian women while omitting that to the elders. It is obviously important for both the elders’ and deacons’ wives to be good Christian women, but it is noteworthy that this is not said in the elders’ list of qualifications.

2) When Paul uses the word “likewise” in the Pastoral Epistles, he always introduces a new group. In 1 Timothy 2:8-9 he distinguishes men from women. In 1 Timothy 3:8 he distinguishes elders from deacons.

In Titus 2:2-3 he distinguishes older men from older women. In Titus 2:6 he distinguishes younger women from older women. We see in these four places that Paul distinguishes different groups with this word, even men from women, what reason do we have to think that in 1 Timothy 3:11 Paul is not speaking of a different group, i.e., women who could serve as deacons?

3) The third and final reason is that of Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2. She is described as “our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church”. The word for servant, as the ESV alternate reading notes, is deaconess. She is a woman and she is described as a servant of the church, a deaconess of the church. She is also described as one who has been “a patron of many and of myself as well.” The Greek word for “patron” is defined by Thayer as “a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources”.^[20] She is not in a leadership role, nor is she a preacher, but she is an amazing helper and servant of the people of God. Barnes says on v. 1, ‘It is clear from the New Testament that there was an order of women in the church known as “deaconesses.”’^[21] John Gill’s notes on v. 1 are likewise worthy to note:

Of this church Phebe was a servant, or, as the word signifies, a minister or deacon; not that she was a teacher of the word, or preacher of the Gospel, for that was not allowed of by the apostle in the church at Corinth, that a woman should teach; see 1Co 14:34; and therefore would never be admitted at Cenchrea. Rather, as some think, she was a deaconess appointed by the church, to take care of the poor sisters of the church; though as they were usually poor, and ancient women; that were put into that service, and this woman, according to the account of her, being neither poor, nor very ancient; it seems rather, that being a rich and generous woman, she served or ministered to the church by relieving the poor; not out of the church's stock, as deaconesses did, but out of her own substance; and received the ministers of the Gospel, and all strangers, into her house, which was open to all Christians; and so was exceeding serviceable to that church, and to all the saints that came thither: though it is certain that among the ancient Christians there were women servants who were called ministers.^[4]

On the basis of these considerations, I believe that women can serve as deacons in the church, but not as elders.

§10 The Work Of Pastors

10. The work of **pastors being constantly to attend the service of Christ, in his churches**, in the ministry of the **word and prayer**, with **watching for their souls**, as they that must **give an account to Him**; **1** it is incumbent on the churches to whom they minister, not only to **give them all due respect**, but also to communicate to them of all their good things according to their ability, **2** so as **they may have a comfortable supply, without being themselves entangled in secular affairs**; **3** and may also be **capable of exercising hospitality towards others**; **4** and this is required by the law of nature, and by the express order of our Lord Jesus, who hath ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. **5**

1. Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Heb. 13:17
2. 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6-7
3. 2 Tim. 2:4
4. 1 Tim. 3:2
5. 1 Cor. 9:6-14; 1 Tim. 5:18

The work of the pastor/elder/presbyter/overseer/bishop/shepherd is one and the same: to serve and rule the local church of God with the Word of God (2Tim. 4:2). They are to care for the flock of God, which God Himself has entrusted into their hands (1Pet. 5:2-3). They are to be diligent in helping those who are

entrusted to their care by serving them and faithfully preaching the unadulterated Word of God to them. They are to watch for the souls of their members (Heb. 13:17). The elders serve fellow Christians and point them to the right and narrow path. They have a great responsibility before God for this task (Jas. 3:1). The Holy Spirit says the elders/leaders will give an account of their work to God. Everyone will give an account to God, but the elders especially concerning how they cared for God's flock. We should realize the responsibility laid on them by God for this noble task and therefore, not be a cause of trouble to them, but let them do their work with all joy and peace. We are called to honor them and submit to them (1Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17; 1Pet. 5:5). We are even called to imitate the example of our leaders and hold them in high esteem (Heb. 13:7).

They should also be paid for their work as a common law of nature and as something likewise sanctioned by the Law of God, as Paul shows (1Tim. 5:17-18; 1Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6-7), for how would they otherwise live? Furthermore, they are to be doers of good, known to be good to others, even non-Christians. They are to be known to be those who are consumed with the Gospel and evangelism. A qualification of elders includes that "he must be well thought of by outsiders" (1Tim. 3:7). This does not mean that all unbelievers should like him, but rather, generally, he should be thought of, even by unbelievers, as a good civilian. His first duty is to the flock of God entrusted to him, but he is also to go to the outside and bring others in (evangelism).

§11 The Work of Preaching The Word Is Not So Peculiarly Confined To Pastors

11. Although it be incumbent on the bishops or pastors of the churches, to be **instant in preaching the word**, by way of office, yet the work of preaching the word is not so peculiarly confined to them but that **others also gifted and fitted by the Holy Spirit for it**, and **approved and called by the church**, may and ought to perform it. **1**

1. Acts 8:5; 11:19-21; 1 Peter 4:10-11

The pastor is not the only one who may teach and teach in the church, but anyone who is gifted by the Holy Spirit to preach, yet is not a pastor, who also is approved by the church may indeed preach the Word. When the church notices that some members have been gifted by God in preaching and teaching, they may, without being pastors, bless the church by their ministry either on the Lord's Day or outside that.

§12 All Believers Are Bound To Join Themselves To Particular Churches

12. As all believers are bound to **join themselves to particular churches**, when and where they have opportunity so to do; so all that are admitted unto the privileges of a church, **are also under the censures and government thereof**, according to the rule of Christ. **1**

1. 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; Heb. 13:17

By becoming members we put ourselves under the authority that Jesus has given the church. There we are supposed to be fed with the Word of God, to have fellowship with believers, we are to be cared for and serve others and the church. By becoming members we agree to be those who want to be the God-ordained authority of the local body. We've discussed this briefly in [paragraph 8 above](#).

Heb. 13:17 **Obey your leaders and submit to them**, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as

those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

A Christian who has not joined a local church cannot obey this command of God. Therefore, such commands which call us to obey and submit to leadership are also indicators of local church membership whereby we place ourselves under the authority of the elders in that church.

§13 No Church Members, Upon Any Offence...Out To Disturb Any Church-Order

13. No church members, upon any offence taken by them, having performed their duty required of them towards the person they are offended at, ought to **disturb any church-order**, or absent themselves from the assemblies of the church, or administration of any ordinances, upon the account of such offence at any of their fellow members, but to wait upon Christ, in the further proceeding of the church. **1**

1. Matt. 18:15-17; Eph. 4:2-3; Col. 3:12-15; 1 John 2:7-11, 18-19; 28:15-17; Eph. 4:2-3; Matt. 28:20

Now we go back to the issue of discipline discussed in paragraph 7 ([see here](#)). Even in a time of problems between members or cases of disobedience, the church order must not be disturbed, because that is not fitting for the name of Christ. Further, they are to normally attend church and the ordinances thereof. Paul, throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14, stresses that the church gathering should be orderly and not out of control. The eldership ought to regulate and institute the order from the Word of God in the church and maintain it. This is the power that the Lord has given them ([par. 7](#)). As Paul said, "all things should be done decently and in order" (1Cor. 14:40). The church gathering is a *holy* gathering and thus, it is not to be like other gatherings. On the Lord's Day, we meet with our God as a corporate body and we should have everything in order and maintain the **Regulative Principle of Worship**. Even if a person is offended, there must be no disturbance of the church service because of that. Neither, as members, they are to neglect to gather on the Lord's Day with God's people (Heb. 10:25) or miss the Lord's Table. Rather than disturbing the church order, they are to seek reconciliation and commit their cause to Christ, the all-knowing and righteous Judge of all.

§14 Pray Continually For The Good And Prosperity Of All The Churches Of Christ

14. As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to **pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ**, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, **1** so the churches, when **planted by the providence of God**, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, **2** ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification. **3**

1. John 13:34-35; 17:11, 21-23; Eph. 4:11-16; 6:18; Ps. 122:6; Rom. 16:1-3; 3 John 8-10 with 2 John 5-11; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:1-4, 16-24; 9:12-15; Col. 2:1 with 1:3, 4, 7 and 4:7, 12
2. Gal. 1:2, 22; Col. 4:16; Rev. 1:4; Rom. 16:1-2; 3 John 8-10
3. 1 John 4:1-3 with 2 and 3 John; Rom. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 9:12-15; Josh. 22

We should not be like the Hyper-Calvinists who believe that they alone are true Christians, but we

should acknowledge other churches of Christ with whom we disagree on secondary and tertiary issues, but that they hold fast to the doctrine of the true Gospel. We should pray for them and for their prosperity, as our fellow brothers in Christ. We are not to be extreme separatists, neither are we to think of our own church alone. But rather, we should care and pray for all the true churches of Christ that they may prosper with the blessing of God and may abide in the pure doctrine of the Word and be a light in a dark world. This is all the more needed in our day when we see the world pressing Christians on things like homosexuality, abortion or the authority of the Bible, some churches have already given in to the world. But we should pray for the churches of Christ that they stand uncompromised on His Word and His authority, not fearing man but fearing God.

We should even partner and fellowship with Arminians. Yes, their views of election are wrong, but most of them are sincere Christians, truly loving the Lord and wanting to serve Him, but have a blind-spot concerning God's absolute sovereignty. The closest theological friends for Reformed Baptists are Presbyterians and other Reformed groups with whom we share a lot of common teachings but differ on secondary issues like baptism, church government (the content of this chapter is totally unique and not taken over from the Westminster), covenants (Westminster Federalism and 1689 Federalism). But we are united in the core teachings of the Bible and the Gospel of Christ, therefore we have unity of faith. We may not worship in the same local congregation, but we are brothers and sisters in the Lord and belong to the Universal Church of Christ.

§15 Many Churches Holding Communion Together, Do, By Their Messengers, Meet To...

15. In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church, in their peace, union, and edification; or any member or members of any church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many **churches holding communion together, do, by their messengers, meet to consider**, and give their advice in or about that matter in difference, to be **reported to all the churches concerned**; **1** howbeit these messengers assembled, are not intrusted with any church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers. **2**

1. Gal. 2:2; Prov. 3:5-7; 12:15; 13:10

2. 1 Cor. 7:25. 36, 40; 2 Cor. 1:24; 1 John 4:1

When there are troubles, problems, and errors, whether theological or practical concerning the church, the church may seek counsel from other churches. There are sometimes problems between two congregations, but these problems should be solved in a manner worthy of the name of Christ. A church may have difficulty with a particular doctrine or thing, and they may send representatives, whether the elders or others, to other churches to seek counsel from them. Notice the wording of the Confession, it speaks of "advice" and not a command, and also the last portion of the paragraph. The local church is autonomous—on its own. They are not to be dictated by other churches, synods, councils or what not. Rather, the church is to be ruled by the elders within that same church. They may seek the advice of other churches, but other churches cannot dictate what they should do.

As A. H. Strong note, "Since each local church is directly subject to Christ, there is no jurisdiction of one church over another, but all are on an equal footing, and all are independent of interference or control by the civil power."^[21] We close this chapter with the words of Dr. Waldron:

The strict limitation of such an assembly is that it is merely advisory. Counsel in the Bible is often

not authoritative, even if it comes from an apostle (1 Cor. 7:25, 40). Hebrews 13:17 equates the leaders of the church with governors, given charge by a king over a province of his kingdom. Such governors may seek advice from one another, but they are legally responsible only to the king.^[22]

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this
rock **I will build my church**, and the
gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

(Matthew 16:18)

Footnotes

1. ^ Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's [Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith](#) which was apparently supplied by the [Westminster Confession of Faith 1646](#).
2. a, b, c, d [Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
3. ^ Keith Thompson. [Does Matthew 16 Teach Peter was the Pope?](#) Reformed Apologetics Ministries, 2014.
4. a, b, c, d John Gill. [Exposition of the Entire Bible](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
5. ^ Sam E. Waldron. *A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith*. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). pp. 388-389.
6. ^ A. H. Strong. *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed For The Use Of Theological Students*. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970. Originally, 1907). p. 887.
7. ^ *Ibid.*, p. 888.
8. ^ Matthew Poole. [English Annotations on the Holy Bible](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
9. ^ John Calvin. [Commentaries](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
10. ^ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications From The Editio Typica*. (Double Day; 2nd edition, 2003). p. 254.
11. ^ [Is the pope the Vicar of Christ?](#) GotQuestions Ministries.
12. ^ Strong, *Systematic Theology*. pp. 894-895.
13. ^ *Ibid.*, p. 897.
14. ^ Sam E. Waldron. *A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith*. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). p. 399.
15. ^ Strong, *Systematic Theology*. pp. 914-915. Words within the square brackets [] are mine.
16. ^ William D. Mounce. [διάκονος](#)
17. ^ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version: The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles (2008). p. 2329.
18. ^ *Ibid.* 2330.
19. ^ Charles J. Ellicott. [Commentary For English Readers](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
20. ^ [Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). G4368.
21. ^ Strong, *Systematic Theology*. p. 898.

22. [^](#) Waldron, *Exposition of 1689*. pp. 410-411.