

Church government
Theological distinctives number seven

1. Introduce last talk in the series...

- a. We are committed to
 - i. The authority of Scripture
 - ii. Gospel centrality
 - iii. Reformed theology
 - iv. Complementarity
 - v. Continuationist pneumatology
 - vi. The centrality of the church
 - vii. And...

2. Prayer...

3. Introduction...

- a. The topic of this morning's sermon is church government.
- b. I know, right now, some of you are thinking there are at least six things I would rather do than listen to a sermon on church government. You would probably rather...
 - i. Clean gum off the bottom of your shoe.
 - ii. Read a phonebook
 - iii. Go to the Dentist
 - iv. Wait in line at the DMV
 - v. Some of you ladies would rather watch the NFL draft.
- c. Why should you care about how the church of Jesus Christ is governed? Let me suggest a few reasons-
 - i. Biblical church governance protects the unity of the church.
 - ii. Biblical church governance protects the purity of the church.
 - iii. Biblical church governance protects the doctrines of the church.
 - iv. Assuming a church has sound doctrine, church leadership guru Larry Osborne argues that the health of a churches elder board trumps everything else in the church. I think he is probably right!!!
 - 1. So goes the elder board, so goes the church...
 - v. Finally, Jesus cares deeply about church governance because the health of his bride is at stake.
 - vi. If Jesus cares about church governance, so should we.
- d. Where are we going this morning? I want to explain three principals for healthy church governance.

- i. *First, Jesus Christ rules the church*
- ii. *Second, Elders lead the church*
- iii. *Third, Deacons serve the church*

1. First, Jesus Christ rules the church

- a. We see Christ's rule over his church manifested in several ways-

i. Jesus is the head of the church

- 1. **Colossians 1:18 (ESV) — 18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.
- 2. See also Eph. 5:25ff, 1:22-23

ii. Jesus is the cornerstone of the church

- 1. **Ephesians 2:19–20 (ESV) — 19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,
- 2. **i.e., the gospel is the foundation of the church...**

iii. Jesus builds the church

- 1. **Matthew 16:18 (ESV) — 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.

iv. Jesus is the chief shepherd of the church

- 1. **1 Peter 5:4 (ESV) — 4** And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
- 2. **Ultimately, Jesus Christ is the lead pastor.**

b. How does Jesus rule the church? Through the scepter of his Word!!!

- i. A scepter is a staff carried by kings as a symbol of their sovereign rule.
- ii. The Bible is the scepter of King Jesus.
- iii. He rules and governs the church with his word.

- iv. **Berkhof-** "He (Jesus) does not rule the Church by force, but subjectively by His Spirit, which is operative in the Church, and objectively by the Word of God as the standard of authority. All believers are unconditionally bound to obey the word of the King. As Christ is the only sovereign Ruler of the Church, His word is the only word that is law in the absolute sense." (Berkhof, 840)

c. Application...

- i. The pope does not have ultimate authority in the church.
- ii. The state does not have ultimate authority in the church.
- iii. The bishop does not have ultimate authority in the church.
- iv. A charismatic pastor does not have ultimate authority in the church.
- v. A board of elders does not have ultimate authority in the church.
- vi. The congregation does not have ultimate authority in the church.

- vii. Jesus Christ has ultimate authority in the church, and he exercises his authority through the Word of God.
- viii. What does this mean?
 1. The only authority that church leaders have is the Word of God.
 2. Said another way, biblical church elders enforce the rule of king Jesus through the Word of God.
 3. If an elder can't point to a chapter and a verse in the Bible when counseling you, you don't have to submit to him.
 4. Sadly, there are some churches that exercise way too much control over people...
 - a. You need to talk to a pastor before you date someone!
 - b. You can't send your kids to public schools!
 - c. You need to talk to a pastor before you move to Kansas!
 5. If the word of God does not say it the elders can't enforce it.
- d. *Not only does Jesus Christ rule his church through the scepter of his Word. He also delegates his authority to lead local churches to godly elders, which brings us to the second point....*
- e. *Jesus Christ rules the church!*

2. Second, elders lead the church!

a. *Let me ask several questions about elders...*

b. What is an elder?

- i. An elder is a man called and equipped by God to lead the church of Jesus Christ.
- ii. The NT uses the words bishop, overseer, pastor, shepherd, and elder interchangeably (Acts 20, Eph 4:11, 1 Peter 5:1-2).
- iii. This means that an elder is a bishop, is a pastor, is a shepherd, and is an overseer.

c. What are the qualifications for an elder? Godliness.

i. 1 Timothy 3:1–7 (ESV) — 1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. **2** Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, **3** not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. **4** He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, **5** for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? **6** He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. **7** Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

- ii. Hopefully you can see from this list that the most important qualification for an elder is Godliness.
- iii. All of these character traits minus three apply to every Christian.

1. Not a recent convert – he needs to be mature in his faith (hence elder-older)
 2. Able to teach- he needs to be skilled in teaching.
 3. Male- elders must be male (1 Tim. 2:12; 3:2; Titus 1:6).
- iv. Looking at 1 Timothy 3 we see that an elder is a man of God whose life is exportable. In other words, when the other elders observe this man they think, we want everyone in the church to live his life like this man lives his life.
1. He passionately pursues Godliness.
 2. He loves his wife.
 3. He is an excellent father.
 4. He understands sound doctrine.
 5. He is committed to evangelism.
 6. He is committed to church.
 7. He loves other people.
 8. He has a shepherding gift.
 9. He has integrity in the market place.

v. *What is an elder?*

vi. *What are the qualifications of an elder?*

d. What do elders do?

- i. The duties of an elder are summed up in the word shepherd. The word pastor is the Latin word for shepherd.
- ii. An elder’s shepherding responsibilities are often summarized under four headings
 1. Elders know the sheep (1 Peter 5:2-5, James 5:17).
 2. Elders lead the sheep (Heb. 13:7).
 3. Elders feed the sheep (Acts 6:4, 1 Tim. 3:2).
 4. Elders protect the sheep (Titus 1:9, Acts 20:17-31, Matt. 18:15-17).
- iii. **Illustration:**
 1. He is a description of shepherds in Bible times from the Dictionary of Biblical imagery.
 2. “... (In Bible times) Sheep were not fenced in and left to fend for themselves. Instead, they were totally dependent on shepherds for protection, grazing, watering, shelter and tending to injuries. In fact, sheep would not survive long without a shepherd. Sheep are not only dependent creatures; they are also singularly unintelligent, prone to wandering and unable to find their way to a sheepfold even when it is within sight...
 3. It was the task of a shepherd to lead sheep from nighttime protection in a sheepfold on safe paths to places of grazing and watering... To protect sheep against predators, shepherds would carry two pieces of equipment, the *‘rod and staff’ of Psalm 23:4, one of them a club like weapon and the other the familiar crook used for protection...

4. So close is the connection between shepherd and sheep that to this day Middle Eastern shepherds can divide flocks that have mingled at a well or during the night simply by calling their sheep, who follow their shepherd's voice. Shepherds are inseparable from their flocks, and their work is demanding, solitary and sometimes dangerous (Gen 31:38–40; 1 Sam 17:34–35). (Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, 782)
- iv. There are lots of Godly men in this church.
1. But not every godly man has a shepherding gift. It is the shepherding gift that makes an elder an elder.
 2. Elders feed the sheep with the word of God.
 3. Elders protect the sheep from wolves.
 4. Elders make sure the sheep get rest.
 5. Elders strive to get sheep to their heavenly home.
 6. Next question...

e. How many elders should a church have?

- i. More than one....
- ii. The NT nearly always speaks of elders in a plurality.
 1. Proof for plurality (James 5:14, 1 Peter 5:1-5, Phil. 1:1, Acts 20:28, 1 Tim 4:14 - all use elder in the plural)
- iii. GCF currently has eleven elders. Each elder has one vote!!!
 1. Show pics of elders...
- iv. Principal of 1st among equals...

f. What are the alternatives to elder governance?

- i. In church history there are several alternatives...
 1. Episcopal
 2. Presbyterian
 3. Congregational
 4. The Moses model of leadership
 5. Other options....
 - a. Single elder with deacons
 - b. Pastoral relations committee
 - c. Single elders with a governing board... almost like a nonprofit board...
- ii. What makes GCF distinct?
 1. We believe that NT churches must be governed by a plurality of male elders.
 2. The Elders are the highest authority in a local church. Which means that there is no authority outside of GCF that we must submit to (Titus 1:5).

g. Application-

i. How should a church choose elders? Sadly, sometimes elders are chosen because they are-

1. Popular
2. Wealthy
3. They have business expertise
4. Social standing
5. Rhetorical prowess
6. Seminary training
7. But... ultimately known of these things matter.
8. Elders should be chosen first and foremost for their Godly character and second for their shepherding gift.

ii. How do we choose elders?

1. Ultimately God chooses elders...
2. It is God who gifts and calls a man to be a shepherd.
3. The elders simply recognize what God is doing through a gifted man.
4. When the elders think a man is called by God to be an elder, they run his name by the congregation in order to give the congregation a chance to provide feedback.
5. Our by laws spell out this process in detail.

iii. How are elders trained at GCF?

1. Discipleship group
2. Small group leadership
3. Elder candidate
4. Elder in training
5. Ordained elder

iv. How should we relate to elders?

1. Imitate them...
 - a. Hebrews 13:7 (ESV) — 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.
2. Submit to them...
 - a. Hebrews 13:17 (ESV) — 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.
 - b. Who do the elders submit to??? Each other.
3. Aspire to be one of them.
 - a. **1 Timothy 3:1 (ESV)** — 1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.
4. Pray for them...
 - a. We need prayer.... Wisdom, protection, courage, etc...

h. What about deacons??? This brings us to the last point....

i. First, Jesus Christ rules the church

ii. *Second, Elders lead the church*

3. Third, deacons serve the church

a. What is a deacon?

- i. The office of Deacon is an office of service.
- ii. We get the word deacon from the Greek word *Diakonia*, which means servant.
- iii. The office of deacon is only mentioned twice in the Bible. In both instances the deacons are seen serving with the elders. (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:1-13)

b. What are the qualifications for Deacons?

1 Timothy 3:8–13 (ESV) — 8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. **9** They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. **10** And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. **11** Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. **12** Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. **13** For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

- ii. Observations about these verses?
 1. Similar to an elder character really matters for a deacon.
 2. There is nothing said about teaching or governing. These are the responsibilities of the elders.
 3. This leads us to our next question...

c. What does a deacon do?

- i. Again, the word deacon literally means servant. The office of deacon is a serving office.
- ii. Many people believe that Acts 6:1-7 is a good example of diaconal work.
- iii. But... we need to keep a few things in mind about Acts 6.
 1. The word deacon (*diakonos*) does not occur in this passage.
 2. Though the word for service or ministry does (cognate noun and verb form of deacon).
 3. All these verses say is that certain men were chosen to serve the widows in order to free up the apostles for the ministry of the word and prayer.
 4. Furthermore, as we keep reading the book of Acts two of the “Deacons” are described as doing things that are not usually associated with Deacons.
 - a. Stephen performed signs and wonders and preached the gospel (Acts 6:8-7:60)
 - b. Phillip engaged in exorcisms, healed the sick, and preached the gospel. (Acts 8:4-13, 26-40)
- iv. What is the point of bringing up Acts 6?
 1. If these men were the first deacons, they did more than help the poor. They were evangelists. They healed the sick and they preached the gospel. In other words,

the deacons job description needs to be broad enough to cover all of this biblical data.

2. If they were the first deacons, they freed up the apostles/pastors to focus on the ministry of the word and prayer.

v. **One scholar writes,**

1. “While the duties of elders are clearly articulated throughout the NT, the same cannot be said for the duties of deacons. The Greek word for deacon simply means ‘servant,’ and beyond that title we are given little indication of what a deacon should do. This is because while the duties of an elder are universally constant in every church in every place in every age, the duties of deacons vary according to the needs of local churches and their elders. In this way, the Bible brilliantly establish a theologically grounded, morally qualified group of senior elder leaders and grants them the freedom to appoint whatever deacons are needed to help them lead the church in whatever areas they deem require a deacon to lead.” (Driscoll, 76)

d. **Who are the deacons at GCF?**

- i. Our small group leaders and a few others.
- ii. They free up the pastors to focus on the Word and prayer.
- iii. They care for the needs of the members by coordinating moves, organizing meals, providing financial assistance, and doing many other things.
- iv. They serve the pastors by providing excellent care for the members.
- v. The qualifications for deacons fit well with the job description of our home group leaders.
- vi. The deacons are really the backbone of GCF... (have them stand and honor them).

e. We have looked at three principles of church government.

- i. *First, Jesus Christ rules the church*
- ii. *Second, Elders lead the church*
- iii. *Third, Deacons serve the church*

4. Conclusion-

- a. Elders and deacons are established by God to protect and defend the purity and unity of the church.
- b. Yet, Elders will fail you!!!
 - i. The best elders and deacons are men at best.
 - ii. Your elders sin.
 - iii. Your elders will make mistakes.
 - iv. You cannot put ultimate trust in your leaders.
 - v. But there is an elder and a deacon who will never ever fail you and he never makes mistakes.
- c. Jesus is the great deacon.

i. **Matthew 20:25–28 (ESV)** — **25** But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **26** It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be

your servant (deacon), 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served (diakoneo) but to serve (diakoneo), and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

ii. Jesus is the deacon who will never fail you. He proved this by dying on the cross for your sins and the sins of all those in his church.

d. Jesus is the great shepherd/elder.

i. **Hebrews 13:20–21 (ESV)** — 20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

e. Lets pray....