

Why Presbyterian Part 2: Church Government -Acts 1:15-26, May 18, 2025

Acts 1:15-26:

¹⁵ And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (a crowd of about 120 ^[a]persons was there together), and said, ¹⁶ “Men, brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his unrighteousness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his residence be made desolate, And let no one dwell in it’; and, ‘Let another man take his ^[b]office.’” ²¹ Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out ^[c]among us— ²² beginning ^[d]with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection.” ²³ And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take the place of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they ^[e]cast lots for them, and the lot fell ^[f]to Matthias; and he was ^[g]added to the eleven apostles.

Intro and Preview:

Two weeks ago we started a study called “Why Presbyterianism.” This is lesson two of seven. I had originally planned to do this message close to the end but we’re moving this message up from the next to last to today. The reason will become apparent as we go through this. As a refresher as to what we talked about and where we are going...

1. Continuity with the Bible
2. Church **Government**
3. Connection to **History**: All of history, early church, medieval, Reformation, & American
4. Commitment to Solas of the Reformation: Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, Scripture Alone, To the Glory of God Alone
- 5. Calvinism**: Doctrines of Grace
6. Covenant Theology & Confessionalism
7. Cultivation of the Mind

That being said, today we are talking about why Presbyterianism -Church Government. Our form of government is a reason to be a presbyterian. Another word for church government is "polity." The question at hand is "how should the church be organized and handle administrative activities and make decisions." We see this passage in Acts 1 an example of how the early church did this very thing. Judas was dead and they felt the need to replace him so as their number being twelve, would be complete. They wanted someone who had been with them since the beginning, being able to testify to the person and work of Christ. There were two men put forth and after a vote, Matthias was selected. The question is who put forth the two men, and who prayed, and who voted? Additionally, what is meant by the word usually translated "office" in verse 20? How we understand these things impacts how we view the nature and structure of the church. What are we to do? Well, there are firstly...

I. Two **Extremes: Episcopalian (High Control Oversight) vs Congregational Democracy.**

A. Episcopal: three tiered system of bishops, priests and deacons, similar to Roman Catholic polity with geographic control but without a Pope. There are parishes and national oversight.

Translate and interpret Acts 1:20 as "bishopric" in KJV. This is the only translation to do this and is to be viewed as revisionist history where the translators were motivated by outside political forces. In this case, King James was consolidating the power of the crown in the church of Scotland.

B. Congregational: Key in on Acts 1:26 and 6:1-6 **voting**. While individual voting affirms the priesthood of all believers (that we all have direct access to God), it does come with some drawbacks, both theologically and practically. Theologically, it ignores God's hierarchical design present in creation. There is a plant and animal kingdom. There is also a human societal kingdom or way it is to be ordered. This is evident throughout both testaments, old and new. The reformers summarized this idea in the threefold division of authority. At the base was the family, the next was the church, and the last was the government or "civil magistrate." Pure democracy and congregationalism minimizes and sometimes ignores this authority structure. Practically, another problem arises. People are prone to not only operate outside God's given structure and thereby ignoring His provided guidance, they are further prone to be overly individualistic and selfish. Without requiring a higher structure, people can and will vote for whatever they, themselves, find most pleasing and convenient for themselves. "Well, *I don't like this or that,*" they say. Highly individualistic folks especially in America cast off all church authority. No church discipline. No church involvement (Dry Creek Wrangler Dewayne).

Episcopal focuses on top-down control and they use passages like Acts 15 to justify that position. We as free people and Biblically informed believers reject the overemphasis on human authority. “we don’t want no king.” “no king but Christ.”

Congregationalism is more grass roots bottom-up democracy Acts 6. We reject any extreme on that end as well.

Presbyterianism has people elect their local leaders who also represent them at higher Church courts.

II. Presby is the “both/and” combo.

- **Plurality of Elders:** Local churches are governed by a session of elders (teaching elders, i.e., pastors, and ruling elders), as seen in Acts 14:23 and 1 Timothy 5:17. This is contrary to both, the congregational model of one pastor, and the episcopal model.
- **Representative Assemblies:** Authority extends through presbyteries (regional), synods, and general assemblies, modeled on the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Again, these leaders are elected by the local churches and serve to represent them at presbytery and general assembly.
- **Congregational Participation:** Congregations elect elders and deacons (Acts 6:3–6; Dt 1:13-15), balancing local input with elder-led oversight.
- **Theological Basis:** Rooted in the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) and the need for accountability (Hebrews 13:17), Presbyterianism seeks to reflect New Testament patterns of order, unity, and shared governance. Benefit: local churches elect their leaders and can vote out corrupt persons, not being held hostage to inept, or evil oversight. Additionally, the higher courts of presbytery and general assembly, the members of which are elected representatives by local churches, can help qualify and install leaders.
- **Historical Precedent**
The American governmental system is based on the Presbyterian form of church government. Presbyterians, often aligned with Patriot causes, opposed British (and Anglican) authority, earning the nickname “the Presbyterian Rebellion” from Loyalists. Their anti-hierarchical polity contrasted with Anglicanism’s episcopal structure, linked to the Crown. For more information on this subject, see Bruce Gore’s YT series on “Presbyterians and the American Revolution.”

III. Household voting, where the heads of households cast a votes on behalf of the family in matters of church governance, such as electing elders or approving pastoral calls, is not a novel invention but a reflection of God’s design for human society. Scripture consistently presents the household as a covenantal unit under the leadership of its head. In Genesis 18:19, God chooses Abraham to “command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord,” establishing the patriarch as the spiritual representative of his family. Similarly, in Acts 16:31, Paul assures the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household,” with the subsequent baptism of the entire household (v. 33) affirming the head’s authority to act for his family in spiritual matters. These passages, alongside others like Numbers 1:4, where “heads of the fathers’ houses” represent their clans, and Joshua 24:15, where Joshua declares, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” underscore the biblical pattern of household representation.

This model finds practical expression in the New Testament church. In Acts 6:3–6, the apostles instruct the congregation to select seven men for diaconal service, a process likely involving household heads given the patriarchal norms of the Greco-Roman world. The “whole congregation” (v. 5) does not imply individualistic voting but a collective discernment, mediated through family representatives, as was customary. The household, as a microcosm of the church, is the natural unit for governance, with the head’s vote ensuring unity and fidelity to God’s covenant (Genesis 17:7). Household voting thus aligns with Presbyterian polity’s emphasis on congregational participation (Acts 6) while preserving the biblical structure of family leadership.

Benefits of Household Voting:

-Coherent with Biblical model of **patriarchy**. Patriarchy is the Biblical norm. Men have the responsibility to provide and protect. They are accountable before God to represent their wives and children. Men bear a burden of leadership and duty in ways that women do not. This practice also drives men to do their duty. It makes them communicate with their families, both instructing and getting feedback. Men must invite and answer questions and be schooled up on issues and help their families operate in unity. Household voting drives leadership.

-Covenantal based at the unity of the family unit. God views families as units. One of the clearest expressions of this truth is in 1Cor 7:14 ““For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”

-Contrary to the spirit of the age: liberalism, feminism, egalitarianism, post war consensus, international liberal order, etc. All of these “isms” are in direct opposition to the Biblical pattern and establishment. Unfortunately, many in the church have failed to recognize this and have surrendered the culture to those ungodly social engineers of such ideas. Much of the so called “progress” of twentieth century in America was a deconstruction of Christian values and social expression. It was not progress but a descent into darkness that directly led to the trans movement of late.

-Consistent **Historically**, in the Scriptures, Christian culture and writings. Household voting was the norm in churches for 1900 years. What changed? The culture changed. The scriptures teach the principle and assume the practice.

Conclusion: I don’t think that household voting will change any outcome of any church election for us, at least not right now. That is not the point. The point is that we as people committed to all the Scriptures want to structure our lives both individually and collectively in the way that God intends. We believe that the Presbyterian form of church government accurately reflects the Biblical pattern. Furthermore, we believe that household voting. For more information, see the paper to be published on the website.

Application:

1. Husbands and Fathers need to **lead**. Wives should help, and children need to participate.
2. **Pray for** our elders. Kids, pray for your parents, wives, pray for your husbands, husbands pray for our elders. All of us need to pray and ask God to do his good will and work in an through us.
3. Pray for and be involved in the **political** process. This applies to church and government. Far too long American Evangelicalism has abandoned this responsibility. This is one of the reasons for the gross degradation of society. The benedict option of reclusion is not helpful.

Closing prayer: Father, help us by Your Spirit to be people of the book, for the sake of Christ. Seal up Your word in our hearts that we might not sin against You. As we come to the table of communion, help us to remember that Christ gave His live as a ransom for many. In Christ’s name, Amen.