

Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Part 2 of 11

Plan for this morning:

- Review
- Overview of first main topic of the FG
- Chapter 1 & 2 of the FG
- Questions

Review

- Three standards
 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Tertiary
- Tertiary standards abbreviations
 - BCO
 - FG
 - BD
 - DW
- Our Constitution
 - Secondary + Tertiary (human and amendable)
 - NOT the Primary (Divine and fixed)

Review cont.

“In summary one cannot differ with the Scriptures, as they are of direct divine origin; one may differ only in minor ways from the doctrinal standards, given that they are the church’s expression of the system of doctrine contained in the Bible. One may, however, believe that the church order merits considerable revision, and yet approve of it if one is willing to work within it.” Dr. Alan Strange

Review cont.

- Why gain some familiarity with our Form of Government?
 - It is *our* application of the teaching of scripture and our system of doctrine that our whole church has agreed to work within.
- We use Tertiary *under* Primary and Secondary—not *against* them.
- Our tertiary standards *don't* cover every circumstance but provide a *framework* within which sessions *actually lead* every circumstance. Sessions must exercise judgment—this is why ministers/elders must be men of wisdom, love, and deep faith.
- Presbyterianism isn't necessary for the being of the church but the *wellbeing*. We *don't* excommunicate Congregationalists, etc.

Review: Principles of Presbyterian government

Assembled from works of Dr. Edmund P. Clowney and Louis Berkhof

- Christ is the only King and head of the church.
- Christ alone is Lord of the conscience of his people in scripture.
- Christ has endued his whole church with power.
- Christ established special offices in the church for her edification.
- The highest permanent office in the church is the preaching presbyter/minister.
- The role of rule in the church is exercised jointly by ministers and rulers “of the people,” elders.
- The principle of joint rule extends to the regional church and whole church.

Christ, the King and Head of the Church

Chapter I

Resurrected and seated at the Father's right hand, Jesus uses his comprehensive authority over all things to give gifts and offices in order to grow and perfect his church (FG I:1).

- Resurrection/ascension
- Comprehensive authority
- Gives
 - Gifts
 - Offices
- In order to grow and perfect

FG I:1 scripture

- Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.
- Matthew 28:18-20 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

FG I:1 scripture (cont.)

- Ephesians 1:20-23 ...that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
- Ephesians 4:10-12 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds^[a] and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ....

Jesus, the only king, rules his church directly and through men that his Spirit gifts to teach and rule according to his word (FG I:2).

- Jesus is the only King and head
- Jesus rules *by his Word and Spirit* (always together)
- His mediatorial office includes all offices in the church
- He rules through men who rule and teach *through his word and Spirit*.
- By doing it this way, Jesus exercises his *own* authority and enforces his own laws.
- The authority of these men rests *entirely* upon Jesus' appointment.
- Jesus has promised *his presence in the midst of his church* as this Jesus-appointed, Scripture-revealed authority is exercised (by them) in Jesus' name.

Things to consider:

- Do you live with an awareness that you have a King?
- When at church, do you consider Jesus as King over all done?
- Can you believe that Jesus has promised his rule through the imperfect men he has appointed to rule particular churches?
- Do you think of resisting the session as resisting Jesus?
- Do you think of Word and Spirit as was that Jesus rules directly and through ministers/elders?
- Do you appreciate that Word and Spirit are always together?
- T/F: The church is a democracy.

The church submits to Jesus' kingship by conforming her government to the commands, pattern (officers, ordinances, government, and discipline), and general rules of Scripture and by conducting such with decency, in order, and for edification (FG I:3).

- Christ's order
 - There are commands (e.g. great commission; gather).
 - There is a pattern: officers, ordinances, government, and discipline.
 - Where no specific command, follow general rules.
 - One general rule is that all is done decently and in order.
- Presbyterian government is for Christ's glory, edification, and enlarged Christian freedom.

How does Presbyterian church government enlarge Christian freedom? (based on Strange)

- Presbyterianism's ministers-ruling-with-representatives-of-the-people frees the church from the "tyranny" of episcopacy.
 - In Episcopacy, all rule lies with ministers of the word.
 - Ministers of the word rule jointly with representatives of the people in Presbyterianism.
- Presbyterianism's ministers-ruling-with-representatives-of-the-people frees the church from the "burden" and chaos of Congregationalism.
 - In Congregationalism, every believer must be a ruler.
 - But, scripturally, not all have been given gifts of rule (e.g. Romans 12:8).

Jesus, who is in heaven, is truly present with his church by the Holy Spirit through whom he gave his word, saves and governs his church, and gifts men for office (FG I:4).

- Jesus is in heaven
- He's really present with his church by the Holy Spirit
- Spirit gives NT revealing his ordinances
- Spirit also exerts saving and ruling power in the teaching of the word and administering of Christ's ordinances
- Only by gifts and calling of the Spirit are men endued and qualified for office in Christ's church.

The Church

Chapter II

The church is the way Christ currently exhibits his reign in this world (FG II:1).

- Heavenly and Spiritual, not of this world (John 18:36).
- The visible church is the manifestation of his kingdom in this world, but it is fundamentally Spiritual—the indwelling of the Spirit—new creation.

Those who profess faith in and promise submission to Christ (and their children) comprise the universal, visible church (FG II:2).

- This statement, again, pertains to the visible church, not the invisible church.
 - Not all who profess faith are elect.
 - Not all children of those who profess faith are elect.
- This is something that Baptists see very differently.
- This speaks to who has *Biblical warrant* to be included in the visible church by baptism
- CF 28.1, “Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church....”

Scripture teaches that the universal, visible church should be organized in local and regional churches confessing a common faith and submitting to a common form of government (FG II:3).

The work Christ has assigned his church to fulfill in fellowship with him is three-fold (FG II:4):

- divine worship,
- mutual edification,
- and gospel witness.

The *ways* Christ appointed for his church to execute this three-fold work include (FG II:4):

- Confessing his name before men,
- ...engaging in fellowship to encourage each other,
- ...reading, teaching, and preaching the word and receiving it,
- ...praying privately, in homes, and as a church,
- ...singing the word of Christ to one another with thanksgiving to the Lord,
- ...fasting,
- ...administering and receiving Baptism,
- ...administering and eating/drinking the Lord's Supper,
- ...collecting and distributing offerings,
- ...exhibiting and practicing mercy,
- ...maintaining and exercising discipline,
- ...blessing the people.

Questions?