

2. Congregational Consensus

INTRODUCTION: Christians agree that *Christ is the head of His Church*. The proper form of church government is ultimately **theocratic**, *a divine dictatorship!*

SLIDE: Flow Chart

However, controversy arises once the organizational flow charts moves down from Christ as Head.

It is interesting how various systems of church government parallel whatever their country's secular government uses. One wonders, *Which is the cause and which is the effect?*

Episcopal. Under Christ as Head, some churches are **episcopal** in their form of government.

SLIDE: Episcopal

Such a church could be compared to a **monarchy**. Ultimately it is one-man rule (a pyramid under a pope or archbishop).

SLIDE: Crown

SLIDE: Presbyterian

Presbyterian. Other churches are controlled by a plurality of elders or a presbytery (from the Greek word *presbuteros*, "elder"). This type of church is **presbyterian** in its government.

SLIDE: Board of Directors

The elders meet together and represent the church. Rather than one man rule it is rule by a board of directors.

This could be called rule by **aristocracy** or an **oligarchy** or even a **republic**.

SLIDE: Congregational

Congregational. Still others hold to **congregational** rule. Such could be categorized as a **democracy**.

SLIDE: Anarchy drawing (!)

Frankly, elements of all three types of government can be observed in the Scriptures. One wise old veteran of kingdom warfare observed that when godly men are in leadership, *any* form of church government works tolerably well. **Which, if any, is the intended New Testament pattern for church polity? (Who's in charge down here?!)**

*****What dispute were the disciples having in Luke 22:24-27? 22:24.**

Note: “greatest” is from *mezas* (basis for “megalomaniac, megaphone”)

Jesus declared, “but you are not to be like that” (22:26a). They were not to be like what? Not like the rulers of the Gentiles who lord it over people (22:25).

SLIDE: Dictators

- 1. In Luke 22:24-27, what does it mean to “lord it over” (22:25) someone?** From *kurieuo* (#2961), “to be master, rule, control” (BAG, p. 458). Thayer said it means “to have dominion over” (p. 365). It is to “boss around”!
- 2. What does it mean to “exercise authority” (22:25) over someone?** From *exousiazo* (#1850), “the right or power to do with something or someone as one sees fit” (BAG, p. 279). *It is to have someone under your control.*

Why did the kings of the Gentiles call themselves “Benefactors” (22:25)?

“Benefactor” is from the Latin word for “good.” Thus, it was a public relations stunt, designed to blunt the ugly harshness of their rule by force.

- 3. What was wrong with the kings of the Gentiles calling themselves “Benefactors” (22:25)?** It was often not true; it was misleading, hypocritical, more rhetoric than fact. They were, in reality, self-serving. **Calling themselves benefactors was akin to modern politicians referring to taxes as contributions!**

SLIDE: People’s Republic of China

Know who else church leaders should not be like?

SLIDE: George Washington.

Church leaders are not even to be like the good rulers of the Gentiles.

What does “instead” mean (22:26)? “Instead” is an adverb used as a substitute or equivalent, as an alternative for something else. The actual Greek text has no verb and is even sharper: “but you, not so!”

4. What does it mean to be like the “youngest” (22:26)? From *neos* (basis for “neophyte, neonatal”) “young, lowest in rank” (Reinecker, p. 207). This could be a small child or the newest person to a social group.

How much authority does the youngest person in a social group typically have?

The youngest in a society usually has the *least* respect, position, social status, or authority.

SLIDE: Picture of Family with young children

What does it mean to be like “the one who serves” (22:26)? The Greek here is *diakonos*, a “waiter.” The idea is that of a waiter who is household servant, a butler.

SLIDE: Waitress, Butler

How much authority do waiters typically have?

OBSERVATION: Based on Luke 22:26, is it acceptable for the church to have “great” people in it? (Are we to have people who stand out among us?) How so? Yes (“greater”). *The New Testament is not anti-leadership.* The point is that leaders exist for the sake of the church, not visa versa. Leaders are to be great in service. **Examples of poor leaders: Eze 34:1-4, 21-24, Jer 23:1-2.**

What literary function does 22:27 serve? It not only rubs in the point made in 22:26, but it sets us up for the ultimate example of leadership: the Lord Jesus Himself. Though being God, He humbled Himself to the point of becoming a man, and a servant at that (cp. **Mt 20:25-28, Phlp 2:5-7**).

5. SUMMARY: What can we learn about the authority of church leaders from Luke 22:24-27?

APPLICATION: The church leader’s authority is to be that of a child and a waiter — precisely those in society who have no authority in the normal sense of the word. Certainly a church leader does not have the same wisdom and understanding as a child. Indeed, he should be among the wisest in the church. The application to be gleaned from Jesus’ words is that rather than lording over the church, they are to lead by example. This type of “authority” will not work in secular governments nor business, but only in a redeemed community.

TRANSITION: The words of Jesus here must be the primary frame of reference for all else that the New Testament says about church leaders.

******In Matthew 23:1-7, why was Jesus critical of the religious leaders of His day?**

- 1.) 23:3b-4 (hypocrisy).
- 2.) 23:5-7 (sin of pride, love of prestige, and self-glorification).

****What application did our Lord offer His disciples in Matthew 23:8-12?

Why was Jesus so against titles (Mt 23:8-10)?

Why did Jesus emphasize that they were all “brothers” with “only one Master” (Mt 23:8)?

How does Matthew 23:11 fit into the logic of Jesus’ argument?

6. **How should Matthew 23:8-12 impact the leaders of our churches today?** On a surface level, it suggests we not address leaders by such honorific titles as reverend, pastor or doctor. On a deeper level we must realize that our only Master is indeed Jesus and that we are all brothers. Church leaders are to lead as humble servants, not exalted lords.

7. **It is critical to properly assess the relationship that existed in the New Testament era between local elders and their churches. By examining the following texts, what can be gleaned about the prominence of elders in the various New Testament churches?** Ro 1:7, 1Co 1:2, 2Co 1:1, Ga 1:1-2, 11, 3:15, 4:12, 28, 31, 5:13, 6:1, Ep 1:1, Php 1:1, Col 1:1-2, 1Th 1:1, 5:12-13*, 2Th 1:1, Heb 13:24, Jam 1:1, 5:14, 1Pe 1:1-2, 5:1-3*, 2Pe 1:1, Jude 1, Re 1:4. There is a decided *lack* of emphasis on church leaders in New Testament writings. The apostles wrote to entire churches (not just the leaders). The writers of the New Testament letters did not just bark orders. Instead they urged, persuaded, argued, and convinced whole congregations. The “brothers” were treated as equals and were appealed to as such (notice for instance the use of the word “brothers” throughout the letter to the Galatian churches)!

With the exception of **Philippians 1:1** church leaders are not even mentioned in the greetings.

It is not until **1 Peter 5** that leaders are written to directly.

The **letters to Timothy and Titus** are understandably referred to as “pastoral epistles” (because of the emphasis on elders), but Timothy and Titus themselves were not pastors — they were apostles, sent by Paul to organize the churches in Ephesus and Crete and then to move on to other locations.

This emphasis on entire churches, rather than on just the leadership of the churches, arises from the fact that responsibility for decision-making rests with the *ekklesia* (church) as a whole. Elders are not lords nor C.E.O.s over the church. Churches are to be elder-led, more so than elder-ruled.

***Technical Notes:**

- 1.) In **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**, “respect” (“esteem” in NKJV) is from *oida*, “to know, to be intimately acquainted with, to stand in a close relation to, to understand” (BAGD, p. 556).
- 2.) “Over” (**1Th 5:12**) is from *proistemi* and though it can mean “be at the head of, rule, direct,” it can also mean “be concerned about, care for, give aid.” Given the tenor of the rest of the New Testament concerning leadership, it most probably should be taken to mean the latter.
- 3.) In **1 Peter 5:3**, that God’s flock is “under” the care of elders or “entrusted” to them, does not necessarily mean the elders have dictatorial powers over the church. In that sense, a picket on guard duty has the camp under his care. It is entrusted to him. But, the picket (sentry) has no authority over the camp. He is a servant to the camp. His stewardship is to guard against enemy infiltrators and even defectors.

8. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia* (#1577). What was the most common secular use of *ekklesia*? Outside the New Testament, *ekklesia* was used almost without exception to refer to a political assembly that was regularly convened for the purpose of making decisions.

SLIDE: Thayer

- According to **Thayer**’s lexicon it was “an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating.”

SLIDE: BAGD

- The lexicon of **Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker** defines *ekklesia* as an “assembly of a regularly summoned political body.”

SLIDE: Colin Brown

- In **Colin Brown**’s *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, *ekklesia*, in the time of the New Testament, is said to have been “clearly characterized as a political phenomenon, repeated according to certain rules and within a certain framework. It was the assembly of full citizens, functionally rooted in the constitution of the democracy, an assembly in which fundamental political and judicial decisions were taken . . . the word *ekklesia*, throughout the Greek and Hellenistic areas, always retained its reference to the assembly of the *polis*.” In the *ekklesia*, “every citizen has the right to speak and to propose matters for discussion . . .”

NOTE: Women were not allowed to speak at all in the secular Greek *ekklesia* (Piper & Gruden, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 150). The *Encyclopedia Britannica Micropaedia*, Volume 3, states that “the ecclesia became coterminous with the body of male citizens 18 years of age or over. . .” (p. 771).

SLIDE: Parliament

SLIDE: Congress

9. How is the secular usage of *ekklesia* seen in its use in Acts 19:23-41

(translated “assembly” (19:32, 41) and “legal assembly” in 19:39)? These occurrences of *ekklesia* (rendered “assembly,” “legal assembly,” and “assembly”) refer to a decision-making meeting of “craftsmen” (19:24). They were “called” (19:25) together by Demetrius into the town theater (19:31). The idea was to decide what to do about Paul (19:25-27, 38), though there was so much confusion the majority did not know why they had been summoned (19:32). This is an example of *ekklesia* where it is used to refer to a regularly summoned political body (in this case, silver craftsmen and those in related trades, 19:25). They convened (as a sort of trade union) to decide what to do about a damaged reputation and lost business (Ac 19:27). As it turns out, they overstepped their jurisdiction in wanting to deal with Paul, so the city clerk suggested that the matter be settled by the “legal” *ekklesia*, Ac 19:37-39 (rather than by the trade union *ekklesia*).

SLIDE: Matthew 16:18-19.

The first occurrence of the word “church” (*ekklesia*) is found in Matthew 16:18-19.

10. Why do you suppose that Jesus (in Matthew 16:13-20) choose such a politically loaded word as *ekklesia* (rather than something like *sunagoge*) to describe His people and their meetings?

Evidently because Jesus intended for His people to understand that they have **the authority to decide things**, just like the secular Greek *ekklesia* decided things. Had Jesus merely wanted to describe a gathering or get-together, he could have used *sunagogue*, *thiasos* or *eranos*. Significantly however, He chose *ekklesia*.

SLIDE: Key & Lock

After promising to build His *ekklesia* on the rock of Peter’s revealed confession, Jesus immediately spoke of the keys of the kingdom of heaven and of binding and loosing. Keys represent the ability to open or close something, “kingdom” is a political term, and binding and loosing involves the authority to make decisions (to permit or to deny).

SLIDE: Castle

A very small key can open an very large door.

God's people (organized in each local church) have a **decision-making mandate**. A church is fundamentally an assembly (or meeting) of qualified (i.e., believers) Kingdom citizens who are authorized (and expected) to make decisions, pass judgments, and weigh issues. The church is to function as a citizen-judiciary (or city council). Understanding that the church has the authority as well as the obligation to settle things is important. Any church whose meetings focus solely on praise, prayer and teaching, to the exclusion of grappling corporately with problems and resolving issues, is failing to fulfill its full purpose as an *ekklesia*.

A look at **church history** also serves to confirm this political idea behind *ekklesia*. For centuries, the church actually controlled the state government (i.e., the Holy Roman Empire or Calvin's Geneva). Though the wrong application of *ekklesia*, it suggests that people throughout the years have understood the political nature of this word.

Practical Observation: The process of achieving of consensus will mostly occur *apart* from 1 Corinthian 14 type of church meetings. Certainly, focused teaching times or perhaps special meetings may be called to explore an issue, but for the most part consensus will be built one on one during private discussions or in such times as the fellowship of the Lord's Supper. Communication and relationships should be such that at any given point in the process of building consensus, every church member should know what every other member is thinking. The matter may not even be brought up in a church meeting until it is time to announce that consensus has finally been reached.

11. How do the following texts illustrate that the responsibility for making decisions resides in the church as a whole, rather than solely with its elders? Mt 18:17-18, Ac 1:15-16a, 21, 23, 6:2-3a, 5a, 6a, 14:23 (see margin translation), 15:1-4, 5-35, 1Co 5:4-5, 12, 6:1, 14:23, 26, 29.

SLIDE: Matthew 18

- **Matthew 18:15-20** ~ The *ekklesia* (18:17) is obligated to render a verdict regarding a brother's alleged sin, and once again binding and loosing authority is conferred upon the *ekklesia*.

SLIDE: Acts 1

- **Acts 1:15-26** ~ Peter identified the need (to replace Judas) but it was the Jerusalem church corporately acted to find a replacement. Peter didn't act unilaterally.
- **NIV Acts 1:15, 23** "In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said . . . So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias."

SLIDE: Acts 6

- **Acts 6:1-6** ~ The apostles identified the problem and suggested a solution. The church approved of their solution and it was the church that selected men to administer the church's welfare system (**6:3, 5**).
- NIV **Acts 6:3, 5** "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them . . . This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose . . ."
- **Acts 14:23** (NIV marginal translation) indicates that the church elected its own elders (though in other passages the apostles appointed them).

SLIDE: Acts 15

- **Acts 15:1-4** ~ The church of Antioch decided to send to Jerusalem for arbitration, and then the whole church in Jerusalem was in on the resolution of the conflict, agreeing with the deliberations of the leaders (**15:4, 6, 12, 22, 23** in KJV).

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 5

- **1 Corinthians 5** ~ Only the assembled church could put the sinning brother out of fellowship.

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 6

- **1 Corinthians 6:1-4** ~ Ordinary believers are declared competent to judge disputes.
- **1 Corinthians 14:29-30** ~ It was made clear that judgment was to be passed on prophetic revelation when "the whole *ekklesia* comes together" (**14:23**).

Thus, church members are to be like citizen-judiciaries who meet together to deliberate and decide issues, or to render judgments (when necessary). This form of government works tolerably well in a smaller (house) church where people love each other enough to work through any disagreements. It is virtually impossible to operate this way in a larger, program-oriented church.

SLIDE: Job 34

NIV **Job 34:4** (Elihu's advice to Job): "Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good"

12. If elders have no authority over the church, then what function do they serve?

Why does a church need elders? See Ac 20:29-31, Ep 4:11ff, 2Ti 3:4-5, Ti 1:9.

Related to the topic of church government, one of the major duties of elders is to help the church achieve consensus, to assist in the consensus building process (**Ep 4:11ff**).

SLIDE: Finding Consensus

SLIDE: W.W.II Torpedo Bomber

Elders serve other functions as well. During the Battle of Midway (World War II), a lone American bomber squadron discovered and attacked the Japanese fleet. Tragically, the squadron attacked without American fighter escort. It proved suicidal. All the bombers were shot down by Japanese fighter planes and all but one of the airmen were killed. One function of elders is that they are to the church what the American fighters were supposed to be to the bombers: **protection** (see **Acts 20:29-31**).

Elders also provide **direction, teaching, counsel**, and help the church grow into **maturity**. More on this will be examined in a following lesson. Church leaders are to be: plural, male, unsalaried, homegrown, non-hierarchical, and servant-like.

Note: It is pointed out in a later lesson that the terms pastor, overseer, and elder are all used interchangeably in the New Testament. These terms all refer to the same person and ministry.

What does the word “consensus” mean? General agreement, representative trend or opinion. It is related to the word “consent” or “consensual.” Another word for consensus might be unity, oneness, harmony, or mutual agreement. Majority rule is a 51% dictatorship and tends to work against unity. Consensus works toward unity. Individual church members must be in fellowship with the Lord, put the interests of others ahead of themselves, and be willing to love each other despite any differences and until those differences are resolved. You must *build* consensus.

13. Taken as a principle, what do 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:1-6, Philippians 2:1-2, 4:2 and Colossians 3:12-17 imply about majority rule (democracy) versus consensus in decision making? Cp Ps 133:1.

SLIDE: Psalm 133:1

— “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in **unity!**”

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 1:10

— “I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you **agree** with one another so that there may be **no divisions** among you and that you may be **perfectly united** in mind and thought.”

SLIDE: Ephesians 4:3-6

— “Make every effort to keep the **unity** of peace. There is **one** body and **one** Spirit - just as you were called to **one** hope when you were called - **one** Lord; **one** faith, **one** baptism; **one** God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

SLIDE: Philippians 2:2

— “make my joy complete by being **like-minded**, having the **same** love, being **one** in spirit and **purpose**.”

SLIDE: Colossians 3:15

— “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of **one body** you were called to **peace**.”

PRACTICAL CONCERN: Some feel government by consensus is too utopian, that it would never work. It is important to remember that the process a church goes through in achieving consensus is often just as important as the consensus that is finally achieved. It takes time, commitment, mutual-edification, and a lot of brotherly love. It truly can work in a small, house sized church. We must love each other enough to put up with each other! **Do we really trust in the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and churches?**

14. What provisions has God made for helping a church to achieve unity (consensus)?

SLIDE: John 17:11, 20-23 (Jesus’ prayer)

SLIDE: 1 Corinthians 10:17 (Lord’s Supper)

SLIDE: Ephesians 4:11-13 (church leaders)

SLIDE: Hebrews 13:7

15. Based on Hebrews 13:7, how are leaders supposed to influence the flock?

Note: The KJV renders Hebrews 13:7 as “remember them which have the rule over you.” The actual Greek is *hegeomai*, a participle meaning “the ones who are leading (or guiding) you.”

SLIDE: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

SLIDE: 1 Peter 5:3

Through teaching and a life-style consistent with that teaching. They are to be respected because of the value of their work (service), not because of any delegated authority. A church leader’s “authority” lies in his ability to persuade with the truth.

SLIDE: Aristotle

“We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. . . his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses.” — Aristotle in *Rhetoric*

SLIDE: Hebrews 13:17

Why does Hebrews 13:17 not totally overturn what Jesus said?

16. TRAGIC TRANSLATIONS: Do a word study on “obey” and “submit” as found in Hebrews 13:17. What do these words mean and how are they different in meaning from *hupakouo* (“obey,” used in Ep 6:1, 5) and *hupotassomai* (“submit,” used in Ro 13:1, Col 3:18, 1Pe 2:13)?

SLIDE: *hupakouo*

•**OBEY:** The normal Greek word for “obey” is *hupakouo* and is used in **Ephesian 6:1, 5** (children & slaves). The word behind “obey” in **Hebrews 13:17** is different from this normal Greek word.

SLIDE: *peitho*

From *peitho*, it means “to persuade, to convince.” See its similar use in **Acts 5:40 & Galatians 5:7-8**.

SLIDE: *peitho* in Hebrews 13:17

Found here in the middle or passive form, it actually means “allow yourselves to be persuaded by your leaders”

The church is not to mindlessly obey its leaders. Instead, there is to be discussion, dialog, reasoning, and persuasion. The church is to be open to being persuaded by what the leaders have to say, rather than responding in robot-like obedience. The words of the leaders are to be given extra weight.

SLIDE: Hebrews 13:17 (again)

SLIDE: *hupotasso*

•**SUBMIT:** The common Greek word for “submit” is *hupotasso* and is used in **Romans 13:1** (government), **Colossians 3:18** (husbands), **Ephesians 5:21** (one another), & **1 Peter 2:13** (kings).

Once again, this is not the word used in **Hebrews 13:17** for “submit.”

SLIDE: *hupeiko*

Instead, *hupeiko* is used — a word that occurs only here in the entire New Testament. Outside the New Testament, *hupeiko* refers not to a structure (like to the government) to which one submits, but to a process or battle after which one yields (surrenders). Thus, “surrender.” It was used of combatants. **Submission still occurs, but the picture is one of serious discussion and dialog prior to one party giving way.**

SLIDE: Robert E. Lee Quote

QUOTE: “After four years of arduous service, marked by unsurpassed courage and fortitude, the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources.” (Robert E. Lee, General Order Number 9, April 9, 1865, Appomattox Court House)

Notes:

- 1.) The word “**authority**” (Heb 13:17), found only in the NIV, is absolutely not in any known Greek manuscript. Along this line, the New Testament never explicitly states that elders have iron-fisted authority over the church.
- 2.) The word “**leaders**” (NIV, Heb 13:17) is from the root *hegeomai*. The KJV renders it, “Obey them that have the rule over you.” However, it fundamentally simply means “leaders” or “guides” of any kind. Though it is used to refer to government leaders in some contexts, no dictatorial powers are necessarily implied by the word in and of itself.
- 3.) **What does it mean for leaders to “keep watch over your souls” (Heb 13:17)?** It refers to picket duty. Pickets are charged with guarding the camp from both intruders and defectors, but they have no general-like authority over the camp. Being an elder is not a glamorous job.

******What special instructions did Peter have for young men in the consensus process (1Pe 5:5a)?**

SLIDE: 1 Peter 5:5

NAS 1 Peter 5:5a “You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders . . .”

Church government is generally to be by elder-led consensus of the whole church. In particular, however, younger men are specifically instructed to submit (*hupotasso*) to the elders.

SLIDE: Distorted Portrait

Sometimes young men can be rather head strong, unreasonable, unyielding, a little too full of vim and vigor.

SLIDE: Don't Be A Blockhead

Young men: Don't be a blockhead! :)

Summary: Church government is generally to be by the consensus of all the brothers, with elders given special consideration in the consensus process. Their arguments are to be given a little extra weight. At the end of the day, if an impasse arises, the church (or more likely, a few holdouts) is to yield to its elders (Hebrews 13:17).

SLIDE: James 3

NIV James 3:17 — “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then **peace-loving**, considerate, **submissive**, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and since

Achieving consensus requires a healthy dose of James 3:17.

Senate Example: In a sense, the church is like a senate, with the authority to make decisions and render judgments that are binding on its members. The elders are just fellow senators who are on some type of special senate committee to study issues, make recommendations, teach, inform, or prompt. The elders are not to normally make decisions on behalf of the senate. They don't preempt the senate. Elders are senator-servants to the whole senate. However, the senate will occasionally find itself in grid-lock, unable to resolve an issue. In such cases, the elders serve as arbitrators or tie breakers and in such instances the dissenters are to "submit" (*hupeiko*) to their leadership and wisdom.

Beresford Job has observed,

"I would say that elders have moral or spiritual authority as opposed to positional authority (which would be represented by *hupotasso*). It's people deciding to follow one's example because one has proved oneself to them. Hence elders having stringent qualifications (which are the character and personal holiness of long experience with the Lord) and being raised up from among those they are going to lead (or how else could those recognizing them as elders know they come up to those qualifications?)

I think Hebrews 13:17 refers to the general attitude there should be towards elders. Rebellion is often aimed at them as the leaders, so the antidote to that is a humble attitude that gives them the benefit of the doubt. That is, if people 'come out fighting' all the time, then what good is that? Hebrews 13:17b pleads with people to make their job a little easier, and this is what certainly will, (I speak from long experience!), as also Paul in Thessalonians also tells the church to esteem those who are over them (*proistemi*) highly (1Th 5:12). So it's not having to submit to elders whatever they say just because they are the elders."

"DANGER, WILL ROBINSON!" What we are dealing with in the final analysis is a delicate balancing act. The church is to be open to being "persuaded" by its leaders. In the course of on-going discussion and teaching the flock is to be "convinced" by its leaders. It is not mindless obedience. After a battle (wrangling over ideas), the few holdouts within the church should "submit" (yield) when necessary to break an impasse. Since the authority to make decisions resides in the church as a whole, this submission evidently occurs during times of grid-lock, when an issue arises that must be resolved but can't be resolved. In such cases, the elders function as predetermined arbitrators.

NOTES ON POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS:

1.) In **1 Timothy 5:17**, "direct the affairs of the church" ("rule" in NASV) is from *proistemi* (see previous notes on 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

2.) How does 1 Corinthians 16:15-16 figure into all this? It is the leader's role to help the church reach consensus. This command to "submit" (*hupotasso*) must be understood in the context of all the other passages. More mature brothers like Stephanos are called to aid the church in reaching consensus. Such men deserve to be listened to by virtue of their maturity and proven character. Thus, occasionally the leaders will need to "pull rank," as in **1 Timothy 1:3** or **Titus 2:15** or **Philemon 8**.

How do the following apostolic "authority" texts fit into the idea of government by consensus? 1Ti 1:3, 4:11, 5:17, 6:17, Tit 1:12-13, 2:15, 3:10. Though they were apostolic workers, Timothy and Titus clearly functioned as elders until local elders were appointed. Thus, the elders that they appointed could be expected to do the same types of things that the apostolic workers did on the local level. From this is it clear that it is proper for elders, in exercising leadership, to authoritatively reprove, speak, teach, and guide. Elders are to "rule well" and "oversee" the churches, taking the initiative in prompting and guarding. As mature believers, their understanding of what constitutes right or wrong behavior and doctrine will most probably be correct. They naturally will often be among the first to detect and deal with problems. However, if those they confront refuse to listen, the elder's only recourse is to then present the matter to the whole church in accordance with the Matthew 18 process. Authority, ultimately, still rests with the church corporately.

Interesting: What authority did the Apostle John, beloved by Jesus, have over the wayward Diotrepes (3Jn 9-10)?

17. Read the chapters entitled "Congregational Consensus" and "The Ministry of Elders" in *House Church: Simple, Strategic, Scriptural*. What do you judge to be the New Testament pattern for church government?

THEOLOGY: How would consensus governing apply to interpreting the Bible?

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. As we survey the beliefs of the church around the world today, and also back throughout the past two millennia of church history, various fundamental agreements can be readily observed concerning the correct interpretation of Scripture. This has to be more than coincidence. It is the work of the Spirit. Some of these general agreements are about such matters as the Virgin Birth, the Trinity (One God in Three Persons), the deity of Christ, the propitiatory nature of Christ's death on the cross, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the future bodily return of Christ, the future bodily resurrection of the dead, and the inspiration and canon of Scripture. When the entire church

universal has arrived at consensus regarding a doctrine, that becomes authoritative. **Does one lone congregation have the right to defy the consensus of the whole church in the world and throughout history?** We think not. These basic agreed upon doctrines constitute a *regula fide*, the rule of faith. We need a good dose of historical humility!

Certainly we should study the Bible as individuals, but we should not study the Bible individualistically. We need to weigh our interpretations against the consensus of the whole church, not just our local church, but the church universal. Historical humility is called for. To reject the time tested conclusions of millions of our fellow believers over thousand of years is to effectively make one's self into his own little Pope.

— SUMMARY —

SLIDES: Summary & 7 Points

1. Churches should have leaders (elder, pastor, overseer, Titus 1:5-9).
2. There is a surprising lack of emphasis on church leaders in the letters to the churches.
3. Congregational consensus is the New Testament norm for church government (not majority rule, not elder rule). Church polity is that of consensus, not command. Authority resides in the church as a whole, not its leaders (Mt 18:15-20).
4. Generally speaking, church leaders have the same authority as children and slaves (or at least so said Jesus, Luke 22:24-27).
5. Leaders are to lead by persuasion, example, life-style, influence and teaching (Heb 13:7).
6. Elders are to be given special consideration in the consensus process (Heb 13:17).
7. Churches are to be more elder-led than elder-ruled (1Pe 5:1-3).

— OBJECTIONS —

How would you answer the following objection? “It is a fact of apostolic history that the churches to whom Paul wrote were newly planted. They were in the incipient stage of development. It was one of the apostle's axioms that an elder should not be a recent convert and that a man must be tested for some time before assuming that office and function. Far too much is made of that early situation. Government was by consensus then, but out of necessity, not out of principle. Paul's instructions to Titus to amend what was defective in the churches and appoint elders in every place rather debunks the argument for government by consensus. It was a passing stage of ecclesiastical development. Babies wear diapers for a time and that is normal. But hopefully they outgrow that stage. Maturity in the *ekklesia* must also come and that means the appointment of elders, which is a shift away from rule by consensus. We

must not build a paradigm of church life from what was a peculiar and passing stage in the progress of the fledgling church.”

ANSWER:

1. The Lord Jesus’ words of Matthew 18 cannot be avoided. We are to tell it to the “church,” not the elders.
2. The fundamental meaning of *ekklesia* refers to a decision making body.
3. Further, the Jerusalem church had both elders and apostles, yet the whole church was in on the decision making process (Ac 15).
4. The groundwork laid by the apostles was foundational. To replace that with something else is dangerous ground, especially when that something else is based on a supposed expectation of development beyond the New Testament texts. This is the point of Jesus choosing *ekklesia* as His preferred word for the church. Each church is it’s own legislature! And this is the great protection against hierarchical structures, which by definition turn churches from being families into organizations - the very thing the Early Church Fathers eventually did.

Again, there is a delicate balance to be reached between the leading role of elders and the *ekklesia*-type responsibilities of the church as a whole. Too far one way and you set up a pope. Too far the other and you have a ship with no rudder. In essence, both arguments for the leadership of the elders and for the corporate responsibility of the entire church are valid. These need to both be emphasized. On one hand, you have elders leading by example, guiding with teaching and by moderating the give-and-take discussion of the assembly. On the other hand, you have the flock. They can do what they want but are exhorted to follow their elders and to allow themselves to be persuaded by their arguments. Elders’ words have weight because and only to the extent that the people give it to them. Elders deserve honor due to the position God has placed them in. This idea is similar to the way elders were respected in Israelite towns throughout the Old Testament. They did not have any actual authority or power, but they sure did accord a great deal of respect. To not listen to the wisdom of an elder was tantamount to calling yourself a fool and a rebel.

— INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW —

18. In the consensus process, exactly who is it that makes the decisions? Men and women both? Or only the men? 1Co 11:1ff, 14:33-35, 1Ti 2:11-15.

Everyone’s thoughts and input is important. Within the Trinity, though God the Father and God the Son are equal Persons, the Son voluntarily submits to the Father’s will. Human family order mirrors this: Even though men and women are absolutely equal in God’s sight, wives are called upon to submit to their husbands. God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the church, and the husband is the head of his family. One way this order is expressed within the church is that only men are to serve as elders and Bible teachers. This order is further expressed in that the men, as the heads of their homes, are ultimately to represent their wives’ opinions in the

consensus process. Certainly the wives have valid opinions and insights. These concerns may be expressed directly by the women to various men in private conversations and or to and through their husbands. Yet in the final analysis, it is the brothers who must make decisions that are binding on the church. The husbands are to duly consider their wife's views, but it is the brothers who have the last say.

In matters of mere preference, being considerate of the women and yielding to their desires is the proper course to take. However, in matters of theology or the application of theological or sin issues, the men must make the final decisions. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, R.C.H. Lenski quotes from an *Opinion of the Theological Faculty of Capital University*, Columbus, Ohio: "How the granting of voice and vote to women in all congregational meetings can do anything but place women completely on a level with men in all such meetings and gravely interfere with their divinely ordered subjection and obedience, we are unable to see." (*The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, p. 617).

What if there are some folks involved with the church who are uncommitted or who are new converts? Do their voices "count" in the consensus process?

This is precisely where **Hebrews 13:17** comes into play. They are to listen to and yield to the wisdom of the elders.

19. What if people begin coming to the church after consensus is reached on an issue? Must the process begin all over again? No, they would be coming with the understanding that the church is already moving in a certain direction. They would be free to try to persuade the church differently, but otherwise must "submit" to the previous decision of the church. This is another example of where **Hebrews 13:17** would be important to remember.

What if consensus is reached by all but one man? Should he be allowed to throw a "monkey-wrench" into the whole process? That depends on who that one man is, his maturity level, and his character. Certainly stubborn, in-the-flesh, socially maladjusted, rebellious, or contentious people should not be allowed to derail the church. This would be another occasion for **Hebrews 13:17** to be applied.

What if a church leader falls into sin or error? How is that to be dealt with? See Acts 20:25-31, 1 Timothy 5:17ff, Matthew 18.

**** = Ask this question before having someone read the text aloud.

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TO DO: Factor in 2Co 1:24 & 2Co 4:5. & 2Co 5:11

2. Congregational Consensus

1. In Luke 22:24-27, what does it mean to “lord it over” (22:25) someone?
2. What does it mean to “exercise authority” (Lk 22:25) over someone?
3. What was wrong with the kings of the Gentiles calling themselves “Benefactors” (Lk 22:25)?
4. What does it mean to be like the “youngest” (Lk 22:26)?
5. What can we learn about the authority of church leaders from Luke 22:24-27?
6. How should Matthew 23:8-12 impact the leaders of our churches today?

7. It is critical to properly assess the relationship that existed in the New Testament between the local elders and the church. By examining the following texts, what can be gleaned about the prominence of elders in New Testament church life? Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1-2, 11, 3:15, 4:12, 28, 31, 5:13, 6:1, Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Col 1:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 5:12-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, Hebrews 13:24, James 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1-2, 5:1-3, 2 Peter 1:1, Jude 1, Revelation 1:4.

8. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia* (Strong’s #1577). What was the most common secular use of *ekklesia*?

9. How is the secular usage of *ekklesia* seen by its use in Acts 19:23-41 (translated “assembly” in Ac 19:32 & 41 and “legal assembly” in 19:39)?

10. Why do you suppose that Jesus (in Matthew 16:13-20 & 18:15-20) choose such a politically loaded word as *ekklesia* (rather than something like *sunagoge*) to describe His people and their meetings?

11. How do the following texts illustrate that the responsibility for making decisions resides in the church as a whole, rather than with its elders? Matthew 16:13-20, 18:15-17, Acts 1:15-16a, 21, 23, 6:2-3a, 5a, 6a, 14:23 (see margin translation), 15:1-4, 5-35, 1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 12, 6:1-3, 14:23, 26, 29.

12. If elders have no authority over the church, then what function do elders serve? Acts 20:29-31, Ephesians 4:11ff, 2 Timothy 3:4-5, Titus 1:9.

13. Taken as a principle, what do 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:1-6, Philippians 2:1-2, 4:2 & Colossians 3:12-17, imply about majority rule (democracy) versus consensus in decision making? Compare Ps 133:1.

14. According to the following texts, what provisions has God made for helping a church to achieve unity (consensus): John 17:11, 20-23, 1 Corinthians 10:17, Ephesians 4:11-13?

15. Based on Hebrews 13:7, how are leaders to influence the flock? Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Peter 5:1-3.
16. Do a word study on “obey” (*peitho*) and “submit” (*hupеiko*) as found in Hebrews 13:17. What do these words mean and how are they different in meaning from *hupakouo* (“obey,” used in Ep 6:1, 5) and *hupotassomai* (“submit”, used in Ro 13:1, Col 3:18, 1Pe 2:13)? Compare 1 Corinthians 16:15-16.
17. Read the chapters entitled “Congregational Consensus” and “The Ministry of Elders” in *House Church: Simple, Strategic, Scriptural*. What do you judge to be the New Testament pattern for church government?
18. In the consensus process, exactly who is it that makes the decisions? Both men and women? Or only the men? 1Co 11:1ff, 14:33-35, 1Ti 2:11-15
19. What if people begin coming to the church after consensus is reached on an issue? Must the process begin all over again? See Hebrews 13:1