

Foundations of Faith (A Catechism for Today)

Lesson 27 – July 2

Question 76: Why does the Presbyterian Church have elders?

The Greek word for elder is “presbyter” from which the Presbyterian Church derives its name. Elders were chosen in ancient Israel to join with the priests and Levites to govern the people. Paul appointed and ordained presbyters and instructed Titus to appoint elders in every city. Elders are elected and ordained to share with the minister in the leadership, pastoral care and oversight of the congregation. Their rule is exercised not individually but corporately through church courts: sessions, presbyteries, synods and General Assembly.

Num 11:16 So the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them”.

Acts 14:23 And after they appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.

Titus 1:5 ...appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

Ex 3:16, 4:29, 12:21

16 “Now go and call together all the elders of Israel. Tell them, ‘Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has appeared to me. He told me, “I have been watching closely, and I see how the Egyptians are treating you.

29 Then Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt and called all the elders of Israel together.

21 Then Moses called all the elders of Israel together and said to them, “Go, pick out a lamb or young goat for each of your families, and slaughter the Passover animal.

2 Chr. 19:8-10 In Jerusalem, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests and clan leaders in Israel to serve as judges for cases involving the LORD’s regulations and for civil disputes. 9 These were his instructions to them: “You must always act in the fear of the LORD, with faithfulness and an undivided heart. 10 Whenever a case comes to you from fellow citizens in an outlying town, whether a murder case or some other violation of God’s laws, commands, decrees, or regulations, you must warn them not to sin against the LORD, so that he will not be angry with you and them. Do this and you will not be guilty.

Acts 11:30, 15:4,6,23; 16:4, 20:17

30 This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. 6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 23 This is the letter they took with them: “This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings!

Rom 12:8 If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

1 Cor 12:27-28 All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. 28 Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages.

Jas 5:14-15 Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

1 Pet 5:1-5 And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: 2 Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. 3 Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. 4 And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor. 5 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

2 Jn 1 This letter is from John, the elder. I am writing to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in the truth—as does everyone else who knows the truth— 2 because the truth lives in us and will be with us forever. 3 Grace, mercy, and peace, which come from God the Father and from Jesus Christ—the Son of the Father—will continue to be with us who live in truth and love. 4 How happy I was to meet some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded. 5 I am writing to remind you, dear friends, that we should love one another. This is not a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning. 6 Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning. 7 I say this because many deceivers have gone out into the world. They deny that Jesus Christ came in a real body. Such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked so hard to achieve. Be diligent so that you receive your full reward. 9 Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement. 11 Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work. 12 I have much more to say to you, but I don't want to do it with paper and ink. For I hope to visit you soon and talk with you face to face. Then our joy will be complete. 13 Greetings from the children of your sister, chosen by God.

Rev 4:4,10 Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. 10 the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

Question 77: Why does the Presbyterian Church also have a diaconal order?

The early church had deacons as well as presbyters. The word comes from the Greek “diakonia” which refers to the church’s ministry of service. Today members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries are designated to various ministries in the life of the church. In addition, some congregations have a deacons’ court to care for the sick, the suffering and the needy.

1 Tim 3:13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Phil 1:2 To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the bishops and deacons.

Rom 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.

1 Tim 3:8-12 In the same way, deacons must be well respected and have integrity. They must not be heavy drinkers or dishonest with money. 9 They must be committed to the mystery of the faith now revealed and must live with a clear conscience. 10 Before they are appointed as deacons, let them be closely examined. If they pass the test, then let them serve as deacons. 11 In the same way, their wives must be respected and must not slander others. They must exercise self-control and be faithful in everything they do. 12 A deacon must be faithful to his wife, and he must manage his children and household well.

Acts 6:1-6 But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. 3 And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. 4 Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.” 5 Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). 6 These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

Question 78: Who are the needy?

All of us stand in need of God’s grace and healing. But in particular, the needy are those identified in Jesus’ parable of the Last Judgement (Matthew 25:31ff); the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. In these and others in need, we encounter our living Lord. The church proclaims the good news of salvation not only by word but also by action.

Js 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Ps 41:1 Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.

Mt 25:40 “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Lk 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

Ps 10:12, 12:5, 35:10

12 Arise, O LORD ! Punish the wicked, O God! Do not ignore the helpless!

5 The LORD replies, “I have seen violence done to the helpless, and I have heard the groans of the poor. Now I will rise up to rescue them, as they have longed for me to do.”

10 With every bone in my body I will praise him: “LORD, who can compare with you? Who else rescues the helpless from the strong? Who else protects the helpless and poor from those who rob them?”

Prov 30:14, 31:9

14 They have teeth like swords and fangs like knives. They devour the poor from the earth and the needy from among humanity.

9 Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.

Lk 6:20 Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, “God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.

Gal 2:10 Their only suggestion was that we keep on helping the poor, which I have always been eager to do.

Jas 1:27, 2:6

27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

6 But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court?