



DISCIPLE *for* LIFE

Basics

UNDERSTANDING THE FOUNDATIONS
OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

*Robert Bruce Jamieson III, Mark Dever,
Jonathan Leeman, & Philip Nation*

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About the Authors

Mark Dever (PhD, Cambridge) is the pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. and the president of 9Marks. He is the author of more than a dozen books, including *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* and *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*.

Jonathan Leeman (PhD, Wales) is the editorial director for 9Marks and is an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. He is the author of a number of books on the church, including *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* and *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule*. Jonathan also teaches at a number of seminaries.

Robert Bruce Jamieson III is a PhD candidate in New Testament and an affiliated lecturer in New Testament Greek at the University of Cambridge. He is a member of Eden Baptist Church in Cambridge, where he lives with his wife and three children. Bobby previously served as an assistant editor for 9Marks, and he is the author of *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership*.

Philip Nation (DMin, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) is a publishing leader, a pastor, and an author. His latest book is *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out*. He regularly blogs about faith, life, and leadership at philipnation.net. Philip developed the content for week 3.

Portions of this study were adapted from the following books in the 9Marks Church Basics Series (B&H Publishing, 2016).

Understanding the Congregation's Authority by Jonathan Leeman

Understanding Baptism by Jonathan Leeman and Robert Bruce Jamieson III

Understanding the Lord's Supper by Jonathan Leeman

Understanding Church Discipline by Jonathan Leeman

Understanding Church Leadership by Jonathan Leeman and Mark Dever

Understanding the Great Commission and the Church by Jonathan Leeman

Introduction

Jesus Christ established the church. Rather than have Christians try to grow and accomplish God's mission as individuals, Jesus has called us together to carry out His kingdom work. The Bible describes the church in many ways, such as the bride of Christ, a body, and a family. It's crucial for us to learn how to relate to Jesus as a church body.

*Understanding the foundations of the church
helps us be healthy church members.*

In His Word God has given us the stories of the first-century church, as well as authoritative teachings about what it means to be the church. As we travel through Scripture together, we'll learn and respond to God's call for Christians to work together as the church.

Over the next six weeks we'll look at the foundations of a healthy church:

Congregational authority
Baptism and the Lord's Supper
Stewardship
Church discipline
Church leadership
The Great Commission

Our prayer is that you'll see how wonderful it is to be a part of a healthy church. God has given us a beautiful gift by connecting our lives together. We'll see that the everyday work of the church is something that, when done in relation to one another and in the power of the Holy Spirit, brings about great spiritual maturity and glorifies God.

How to Use This Study

This Bible study book includes six weeks of content. Each week has an introductory page summarizing the focus of the week's study, followed by content designed for groups and individuals.

GROUP SESSIONS

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. This group session is designed to be one hour or more, with approximately 15 minutes of teaching and 45 minutes of personal interaction. It's even better if your group is able to meet longer than an hour, allowing more time for participants to interact with one another.

Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the video teaching by a group of trusted pastors.

Start

This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video segment.

Watch

This page includes key points from the video teaching, along with space for taking notes as participants watch the video.

Discuss

These two pages include questions and statements that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

Pray

This final page of each group session includes a prompt for a closing time of prayer together and space for recording prayer requests of group members.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Each *Disciple for Life* small-group resource provides individuals with optional activities during the week, appealing to different learning styles, schedules, and levels of engagement. These options include a plan for application and accountability, a Scripture-reading plan with journaling prompts, a devotion, and two personal studies.

This Week's Plan

Immediately following the group session's prayer page is a weekly plan offering guidance for everyone to engage with that week's focal point, regardless of a person's maturity level or that week's schedule.

You can choose to take advantage of some or all of the options provided. Those options are divided into three categories.

Read

A daily reading plan is outlined for Scriptures related to the group session. Space for personal notes is also provided. Instructions for using the HEAR journaling method for reading Scripture can be found on pages 8–11.

Reflect

A one-page devotional option is provided each week to help members reflect on a biblical truth related to the group session.

Personal Study

Two personal studies are provided each week to take individuals deeper into Scripture and to supplement the biblical truths introduced in the teaching time. These pages challenge individuals to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to make practical application to their lives.

LEADER GUIDES

Pages 120–31 at the back of this book contain a guide that develops a leader's understanding of the thought process behind questions and suggests ways to engage members at different levels of life-changing discussion.

The HEAR Journaling Method for Reading Scripture

Daily Bible Reading

Disciple for Life small-group Bible studies include a daily reading plan for each week. Making time in a busy schedule to focus on God through His Word is a vital part of the Christian life. If you're unable to do anything else provided in your Bible study book during a certain week, try to spend a few minutes in God's Word. The verse selections will take you deeper into stories and concepts that support the teaching and discussion during that week's group session.

Why Do You Need a Plan?

When you're a new believer or at various other times in your life, you may find yourself in a place where you don't know where to begin reading your Bible or how to personally approach Scripture. You may have tried the open-and-point method when you simply opened your Bible and pointed to a verse, hoping to get something out of the random selection from God's Word. Reading random Scriptures won't provide solid biblical growth any more than eating random food from your pantry will provide solid physical growth.

An effective plan must be well balanced for healthy growth. When it comes to reading the Bible, *well balanced* and *effective* mean reading and applying. A regular habit is great, but simply checking a box off your task list when you've completed your daily reading isn't enough. Knowing more about God is also great, but simply reading for spiritual knowledge still isn't enough. You also want to respond to what you're reading by taking action as you listen to what God is saying. After all, it's God's Word.

To digest more of the Word, *Disciple for Life* small-group Bible studies not only provide a weekly reading plan but also encourage you to use a simplified version of the HEAR journaling method. (If this method advances your personal growth, check out *Foundations: A 260-Day Bible-Reading Plan for Busy Believers* by Robby and Kandi Gallaty.)

Journaling What You HEAR in God's Word

You may or may not choose to keep a separate journal in addition to the space provided in this book. A separate journal would provide extra space as well as the opportunity to continue your journal after this study is completed. The HEAR journaling method promotes reading the Bible with a life-transforming purpose. You'll read in order to understand and respond to God's Word.

The HEAR acronym stands for *highlight, explain, apply, and respond*. Each of these four steps creates an atmosphere for hearing God speak. After settling on a reading plan, like the one provided in this book in the section "Read" each week, establish a time for studying God's Word. Then you'll be ready to HEAR from God.

Before You Begin: The Most Important Step

To really HEAR God speak to you through His Word, always begin your time with prayer. Pause and sincerely ask God to speak to you. It's absolutely imperative that you seek God's guidance in order to understand His Word (see I Cor. 2:12-14). Every time you open your Bible, pray a simple prayer like the one David prayed: "Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wonderful things from Your instruction" (Ps. 119:18).

H = Highlight

After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, open this book to the week's reading plan, open a journal if you'd like more space than this book provides, and open your Bible. For an illustration let's assume you're reading Philippians 4:10-13. Verse 13 may jump out and speak to you as something you want to remember, so you'd simply highlight that verse in your Bible.

If keeping a HEAR journal, on the top line write the Scripture reference and the date and make up a title to summarize the meaning of the passage. Then write the letter H and record the verse that stood out and that you highlighted in your Bible. This practice will make it easy to look back through your journal to find a passage you want to revisit in the future.

E = Explain

After you've highlighted your verse(s), explain what the text means. Most simply, how would you summarize this passage in your own words? By asking some simple questions, with the help of God's Spirit, you can understand the meaning of the passage or verse. (A good study Bible can help answer more in-depth questions as you learn to explain a passage of Scripture.) Here are a few good questions to get you started:

- Why was the verse or passage written?
- To whom was it originally written?
- How does the verse or passage fit with the verses before and after it?
- Why would the Holy Spirit include this passage in the Bible book?
- What does God intend to communicate through the text?

If keeping a HEAR journal, below the H write the letter E and explain the text in your own words. Record any answers to questions that help you understand the passage of Scripture.

A = Apply

At this point you're beginning the process of discovering the specific personal word God has for you from His Word. What's important is that you're engaging with the text and wrestling with the meaning. Application is the heart of the process. Everything you've done so far coalesces under this heading. As you've done before, answer a series of questions to discover the significance of these verses to you personally, questions like:

- How can this verse or passage help me?
- What's God saying to me?
- What would the application of this verse look like in my life?

These questions bridge the gap between the ancient world and your world today. They provide a way for God to speak to you through the specific passage or verse.

If keeping a HEAR journal, write the letter A under the letter E, where you wrote a short summary explaining the text. Challenge yourself to write between two and five sentences about the way the text applies to your life.

R = Respond

Finally, you'll respond to the text. A personal response may take on many forms. You may write an action step to do, describe a change in perspective, or simply respond in prayer to what you've learned. For example, you may ask for help in being bold or generous, you may need to repent of unconfessed sin, or you may need to praise God. Keep in mind that you're responding to what you've just read.

In this book or in your journal, record your personal application of each passage of Scripture. You may want to write a brief explanation-and-application summary: "The verse means _____, so I can or will _____."

If keeping a HEAR journal, write the letter R, along with the way you'll respond to what you highlighted, explained, and applied.

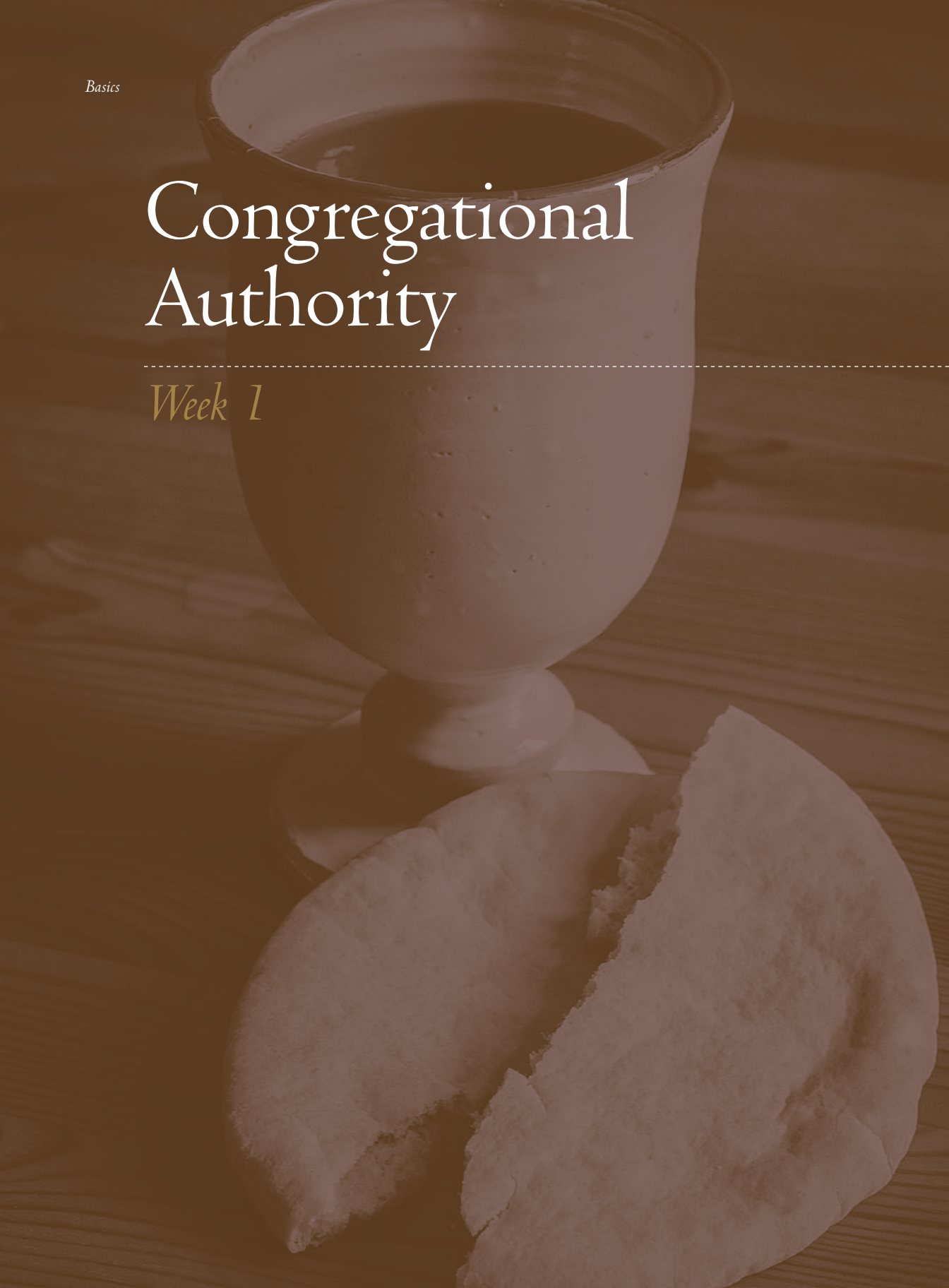
Notice that all the words in the HEAR method are action words: *highlight, explain, apply, respond*. God doesn't want us to sit back and wait for Him to drop truth into our laps. God wants us to actively pursue Him instead of waiting passively. Jesus said:

Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you.
Matthew 7:7

Basics

Congregational Authority

Week 1



The church is amazing. As God assembles Christians together in a group, He allows us to be a blessing to one another, a collective witness to the world, and a means of displaying His glory on the earth. God Himself has ordained that Christians work together in what He's named the church.

As we study the basic nature of the church, we want to start with simply holding the whole idea in wonder. It's amazing that God has saved us and allowed us to be a part of His covenant people.

As we take time to study, discuss, and pray, we should do so with both joy and humility. To the church God has given His great message of redemption. With this message we carry an unexpected authority.

This week we'll seek to understand the congregation's authority. When we hear the word *authority*, it often simply conveys the idea of making decisions. But the Lord has so much more in store for believers in the way we exercise authority. The authority God gives to the church is to carry out a primary command from Jesus: to make disciples (see Matt. 28:19).

To discover how we're to use the authority God has entrusted to the congregation, we need to better understand the makeup of a church and how God instructs us to operate as a collective group of believers. Only then can we live out the authority He's given to the congregation.

Start

Welcome everyone to session 1 of *Basics*.

Use the following content to begin your time together.

The church is the called-out people of God. But throughout the past two thousand years, people have often misunderstood the nature of the church—the reason for its existence, how it operates, and why it acts as it does. Too often we've accepted cartoonlike caricatures of the church to understand its nature.

As you begin this Bible study together with a group of other people, what do you hope to gain from learning about the nature and work of the church?

What's the greatest blessing you've received from being part of a church?

The church contains unity in diversity. As those who've confessed Christ as Lord and Savior, we now belong to the church. God doesn't require or expect us to leave our distinctiveness behind. Rather, He has a plan to work through each one of us. Yet He brings about a beautiful unity of faith amid the diversity of our individual lives.

The church requires that we work together but not by our own power or authority. Rather, God gives the people of God a kind of authority. It's a sacred trust that we must use wisely and only for God's glory. Let's see what Pastor Mark Dever has to say in video session I about God's intention for the church to exercise gospel authority in its work. Mark is the senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

Pray for God to open your hearts and minds before you watch the video for session 1.

Watch

Use the space below to follow along and take notes as you watch video session 1.

Jesus intended us not to live the Christian life alone.

Elders have the responsibility to teach, to guide, but they aren't the church. The congregation is the church.

The elders are the steering wheel of the church. The congregation doesn't steer. The congregation is more like the emergency brake.

The congregation that sits and listens to false teaching bears some of the responsibility for that false teaching.

When you take that church covenant, you're taking it with all the members of that congregation.

The church is Jesus' evangelism plan, and it's also His discipleship plan.

In some sense the local church is like an assurance-of-salvation cooperative. We join because we want to help make sure we're following the Lord.

Discuss

Use the following statements and questions to discuss the video.

Pastor Mark Dever said the church is both universal (meaning all true Christians in all churches at all times) and local (meaning a particular congregation of Christians).

Describe the way your congregation works together for God's glory.

Read aloud Acts 2:41-47.

What's the job of a congregation?

The congregation gathers to do certain activities. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two of these activities. Pastor Mark also mentioned such things as preaching, hearing the Word, singing, and praying. But the role of the congregation is also to guard the gospel and the gospel people. More specifically, its job is to make disciples and to guard the church against false teachers.

A key question we must ask about the work of the church is "Who leads in these practices?" How would you answer this question?

An important portion of congregational authority is to call out and empower leaders to lead out in areas of ministries. The congregation holds this authority as a body so that individuals don't become enamored with power and attempt to supplant Jesus' place as our sovereign Lord.

How should the church choose the people who hold offices?

The church is led by pastors and elders who are accountable to the congregation. The leaders are required to deliver the truth of the gospel to the

congregation. In response the congregation must unify around sound doctrine and live out biblical faith.

Read aloud 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

What would cause a congregation to want their ears tickled rather than to hear the truth of Scripture?

The apostle Paul was teaching Timothy, the pastor of a local congregation, about the dangers that would arise in ministry. False doctrine of the world is always a temptation for the church.

When the truth isn't taught by the church, who bears the weight of responsibility—the leaders or the congregation? Explain.

Pastor Mark described the congregation as an emergency brake and the leadership as a steering wheel. These images help us understand congregational authority. The elders or pastors are responsible for guiding the church to learn God's Word and to be obedient to His mission. The congregation is responsible for confronting members and leaders who fall into false doctrine or become disobedient to Christ.

How does congregational authority facilitate evangelism?

What's the congregation's role in discipleship?

The congregation as a whole—not just individuals—establishes the proclamation of the gospel and then declares who has honestly responded in faith to that message. Rather than sending out lone-ranger Christians into the world, God accomplishes His evangelistic work through the church as it professes the gospel. Likewise, the church disciplines believers. The whole church is responsible for this work.

Pray

As you reflect on the video teaching and the group discussion, you have an opportunity to pray for your church in specific ways. Here are some prayer priorities to focus on before the next group session.

- Unity in the life of your church, particularly in places where you have nothing in common but the gospel
- A culture of discipling in your church in which making and growing disciples is practiced as an ordinary part of the Christian life
- Discernment and faithfulness for elders and pastors in their work of leading the congregation to minister to one another
- Commitment to the work of the gospel in the church, recognizing the church's authority to protect and proclaim that gospel
- Faithfulness and repentance for members who are apathetic and content to remain anonymous in the life of the church

Prayer Requests

This Week's Plan

Worship

- [] Read your Bible. Complete the reading plan on page 20.
- [] Spend time with God by engaging with the devotional experience on page 21.
- [] Spend time in daily prayer for the church and the members of the group.

Personal Study

- [] Read and interact with “Biblical Order for the Church” on page 22.
- [] Read and interact with “Working Together” on page 26.

Application

- [] Identify an area in your life where the church hasn't had much influence. Invite a small group of friends (perhaps from your Bible-study group) to begin holding you accountable in this area.
- [] Memorize I Corinthians 15:3-4: “I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”
- [] Start a journal by recording different ways you benefit from the work of the church. Use it as a way to offer thanks to God for His kind work toward you through His body.
- [] List five church members who need ministry. Determine how, over the next few weeks, you can provide ministry to them in such a way that they better understand the power of the gospel.

Read

Read the following Scripture passages this week. Use the acronym HEAR and the space provided to record your thoughts or action steps.

Day 1: I Corinthians 12:12-31a

Day 2: Matthew 18:15-20

Day 3: Acts 2:41-47

Day 4: Acts 4:32-37

Day 5: 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Day 6: Matthew 16:13-19

Day 7: I Timothy 3:1-7

Reflect

LIVING AS PRIEST-KINGS OF THE KINGDOM

Christians are united with Christ. It's an overwhelming thought for mere mortals. As simple creatures who are born with a nature bent toward sin, we actively pursue rebellion. Yet through God's salvation we're transformed. God changes our identity from people who groped in the darkness. Now we're people who live by the light of Christ. Peter described our new identity. He said we're "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession" (1 Pet. 2:9). This verse helps us see who we are in Christ so that we can operate together in the congregational authority God gives us.

WE'RE A CHOSEN RACE. God knew we could never attain salvation for ourselves, so He extended His grace to us. By God's mercy Christians are plucked out of the condemnation we earned by our sin. Believers now make up a new chosen race that's distinct from the world.

WE'RE ROYAL PRIESTS. As God's adopted children, we possess authority to call others under His reign.

WE'RE A HOLY NATION. Collectively, we hold one another accountable for living out the faith. Not merely an intellectual exercise, holiness must occur in the daily grind. As fellow disciples, we help one another through counsel and ministry.

WE'RE OWNED BY GOD. His ownership over our lives and those in our church signifies an eternal shift. We're no longer slaves to sin. Instead, we serve the one true God. The Lord can now work in and through us to exercise His authority in the church.

In all these ways we publicly declare that God is the One—the only One—who can call us out of the darkness and into the light of His salvation.

Personal Study 1

BIBLICAL ORDER FOR THE CHURCH

Scripture gives some insight on the order of the church—the way the church governs itself. As Christians, we shouldn't see the order and leadership of our church as matters for others to decide. Instead, because we're part of God's people, we should be deeply concerned that the church operates as God intends. The authority of a congregation is expressed in the way it operates.

The New Testament calls for elders or pastors to oversee the church. (*Elder* and *pastor* are used interchangeably throughout this study.) The Bible also calls for the congregation's members to carry out the work of the church (see Eph. 4:12). Through this partnership between elders and members, a structure is established through which decisions are made. By engaging together, the elders and the members accomplish the work of gospel ministry. This type of church structure is often called elder-led congregationalism.

Elder-led congregationalism requires elders to lead and teach the members of the church their responsibilities for living as Christian disciples. As leaders, the elders are to focus their attention on two primary tasks: making decisions and training disciples.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16. How does the role of elders in a congregation ensure that the church remains faithful to God's mission?

In *Understanding the Congregation's Authority* Jonathan Leeman states, "Elder-led congregationalism is a gospel powerhouse."¹ He describes five ways this form of church structure encourages a proper biblical order in a congregation, that is, the way the church is to carry out its mission.

1. GUARDS THE GOSPEL. The most important authority the church has is to declare and thereby guard the message of the gospel. Paul wrote:

I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to change the good news about the Messiah. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!

Galatians 1:6-9

Who in this passage is Paul tasking with protecting the gospel in the church—the members or the leaders? Why is this significant?

Paul gave the congregation more authority than even an apostle or an angel from heaven to protect the gospel message. This makes it important for church members to take seriously the task of learning, studying, and growing in their understanding of the gospel. A good pastor should always say, “Fire me if I begin to preach a false gospel,” just as Paul did.

Read I Corinthians 15:I-II and record a brief definition of *gospel*.

Overseeing the good news of Christ isn't given to Christian seminaries, missions agencies, or charities. It isn't given to philosophers, governors, or earthly rulers. Rather, it's entrusted to the leaders and members of a congregation to carefully tell and explain the gospel.

How does your church work to guard the gospel?

2. MATURES CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES. A second result of biblical order in the church is that we fulfill our mission of making and maturing Christian disciples. The Great Commission states:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:18-20

Circle the key words, especially the verbs, in the previous passage.

This commission comes from the lips of Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. He commanded us to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. Notice that He didn't command us to make converts. Instead, we're to make disciples who join the church and mature in their love for and obedience to Christ.

3. STRENGTHENS THE WHOLE CHURCH. When the church ministers in the order set out by the New Testament, more people are able to participate. The whole church needs to be strengthened in its work. We miss the point of passages such as I Corinthians 12–14 when we reserve ministry for a select few. Instead, the Holy Spirit has placed gifts in the body of Christ as He wills, and each person has a role to play. Therefore, we should work—yes, work—to strengthen everyone.

4. FORTIFIES THE CHURCH'S HOLY INTEGRITY & WITNESS.

When was the last time you heard or saw a positive story about a Christian congregation in the news? It happens but not very often. Knowing this would be the case, Jesus spoke about it in Matthew 5:10-12; 24:9; and John 15:18-25. Because we know persecution will happen, we must prepare one another for it.

A properly ordered church strengthens one another against the temptations of apathy and compromise. Dutifully strengthening one another makes it natural to challenge and uphold one another when temptation is near.

Record a time when another Christian held you accountable in a loving fashion to maintain your gospel integrity.

5. EQUIPS THE CONGREGATION TO LOVE ITS NEIGHBORS BETTER IN WORD AND DEED. The church works to bring in others who will live as Christian disciples. It's the loving thing to do. We give a verbal witness so that others can know the truth and respond to it. We live out the commands of the Bible through our ministry so that others can see the impact of the gospel on our lives. Living in the congregation's authority enables believers to do these things more effectively.

In John 13:34-35 Jesus taught that the world will know we're Christians by our love for one another. Later in the New Testament James described the way we should live out our faith:

Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James 1:27

James instructed us to care for those who can't care for themselves.

List ways your congregation can equip members to love the people of your community through both verbal witness and caring ministry.

As you close out this section, describe how biblical order enables the church to operate as God intends.

Personal Study 2

WORKING TOGETHER

The church works together. That's God's plan for us. Consider the several images the New Testament uses for the church. Believers are pictured as the body of Christ (see I Cor. 12), a holy nation (see I Pet. 2:9), and a building not built by human hands (see 2 Cor. 5:1). God clearly positions His people as those who work together toward common goals for His kingdom.

Read I Corinthians 12:12-20. Record a summary of the passage to describe how the church works together.

The church is designed to operate in such a way that it expresses the gospel and draws people to live by faith in Christ. This must happen within the biblical order that's brought about when the congregation expresses its spiritual authority. The church is Jesus' program for extending His reign throughout humanity. He's actively calling people to follow Him as both Lord and Savior. To do so, God has assembled Christian disciples together as the church. The way the church is organized and expresses its authority should fulfill the purpose for its existence.

Biblical order doesn't call for a small group to hold such power over the people that this leadership pack usurps the authority of Christ. Nor does it give us a system by which every member should feel the need to reset the course and strategy of the church. Paul told us that Jesus is "the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23). The church has elders leading under the headship of Jesus and members working in their spiritual authority to introduce the gospel to the world.

The Authority of the Body of Christ

Jesus once described the authority given to the congregation as "the keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19). This concept has struck some people as mysterious, but placed in its context, it can be clearly understood.

Jesus was in Caesarea Philippi with His disciples when they discussed His identity according to the crowds and the apostles. Some of the crowds thought He was an Old Testament prophet who'd come back to life. When Jesus asked the apostles for their thoughts, Simon Peter stated his belief that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son. Jesus clearly affirmed Peter's assertion:

Jesus responded, "Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:17-19

Jesus was clear that the church is His to build. On our own we don't have the authority to do so. But then He made it equally clear that He would build the church on confessors who confess the right confession—that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.

Later, in Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gave an additional teaching that helps us understand the authority that comes through "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). Believers are expected to hold fellow Christians accountable for living holy lives that reflect the gospel. If they don't repent, we're to lovingly challenge and correct them, even to the point of removing them from the fellowship of the church if they remain in sinful rebellion. The point in giving the collective church this authority is to identify what's a proper confession of the gospel and who's a proper confessor. We must discipline our communication of the gospel to be strictly biblical. Then we're to carefully identify who is and who isn't a member of the church. We bring in those who confess the gospel, and we remove those who won't live according to that confession.

How can a local congregation practically minister in a way that shows they're using the keys of the kingdom?

The Work of Elders and Pastors

Let's briefly look at areas of the work that church leaders must accomplish in elder-led congregational government.

ELDERS MUST LEAD. Hebrews 13:17 tells the church to obey its leaders. Elders must study the Scriptures to understand how God intends for the church to minister. On the other hand, leaders must not operate in a relational vacuum. Instead, elders participate in a virtuous cycle of decision making and building relationships. They lead congregational members as fellow believers rather than lording over them like earthly dictators.

ELDERS MUST TEACH. When Paul wrote to Timothy about the qualifications for elders, he included the ability to teach (see I Tim. 3:2). Elders must teach the congregation to live out the faith. They must also train those who will later serve as elders. The men God calls and the congregation then recognizes as elders must learn how to possess and exercise authority in the congregation.

Describe ways you can help the pastor or elders of your church fulfill their responsibilities.

The Work of the Congregation

As a member of the congregation, you're a priest-king. Jonathan Leeman defines this term this way: "If a king rules, a priest-king rules on behalf of a greater king, God. That is, the priest-king mediates God's rule and works to protect what's holy."¹ Under the new covenant of salvation through Christ, Christians are set apart as the people of God. Our union with the true King—Jesus—gives

us the responsibility to declare God's rulership on the earth. Here are some practical ways church members can live out the faith as priest-kings.

ATTEND CHURCH REGULARLY. We're to faithfully assemble with the church (see Heb. 10:24-25). We need the encouragement and challenge of being with other believers. Additionally, they need our presence. Christians should see attending worship, Bible studies, and member meetings as important priorities.

HELP PRESERVE THE GOSPEL. The gospel is the primary truth that creates the church. In Galatians 3:1-5 Paul expressed his disappointment with the church in Galatia for being so quickly distracted from the gospel. As a congregational member, keep your mind and heart focused on communicating the gospel to the world.

HELP AFFIRM GOSPEL CITIZENS. By preserving the gospel message, we can know who is and who isn't suited to be affirmed as a member of the body of Christ. We do this not from malice but from kindness. It's the way churches know how to properly encourage a person toward Christlikeness. By affirming Christians as gospel citizens, we can disciple them toward maturity. Conversely, we can discipline those who are living counter to the gospel.

SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH OUTSIDERS. We're called to make disciples of all nations. According to 2 Corinthians 5:20, we're to "plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God.'" Exercising our authority isn't just for the interior work of church life. It's to declare the authority of the gospel to a world in rebellion. By doing so, we serve as priest-kings who are ambassadors of God and advocates for others to come under His good kingship.

As you consider the work of the congregation, identify the area you need to work on most. Why did you identify this area?

1. Jonathan Leeman, *Understanding the Congregation's Authority* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 21.