

## 2025-03-16 - The Practice of Presbyterianism - Shawn Mathis (320252055587809) SermonOnly

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 4. 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse 14. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. 1 Timothy 4, 14.

Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery or eldership in some translations. Let us pray. And here, God, we see a snippet of how the church was organized of old that men did not anoint themselves, but rather were recognized by the church and chosen therein after due examination.

And here, Paul is reminding Timothy of these matters and he should not shrink from his duty, but stand firm upon the fact that he has been chosen in the public way in which others are not to exercise the office of the pastor. Gracious God above, may you strengthen our pastors and ministers in this land to do the same thing as well, to apply the word of God appropriately, but also, God, we ask that they would examine the word, indeed, all of us would, to see how the church should be organized. Should it be independent, every church doing what is right in their own eyes, or rather, should we be connected in some way in what that connection looks like, God? And I ask and pray your spirit that you would guide my lips that we can see and how Presbyterianism is the best solution and answer to these questions, we pray by your son alone, amen.

In the prior sermon of last week, I argued for the existence of a collection of church officers with authority over a region of the church, what is known as a presbytery. I went through the biblical evidence and the usage of the word presbytery here in particular in verse 14 of chapter 4, 1 Timothy. It is about the regional collection of churches here.

It is about a presbytery with a Y in the English, it's different in the Greek, but it's very close. Remember, it's a transliteration, you can almost, you know, some of the Greek lettering, you can almost read it that way. And it's different, like you hear in English, from presbyters, plural.

It's not by the laying on the hands of elders, a bunch of elders, but an institution known as a presbytery, or as the NKJV uses here, eldership, because they were struggling, it wasn't elders, plural, something else going on here. And it's not eldership as the idea of this abstract entity laying on of hands. It's a collection of men with a regional authority over the churches around them, a presbytery is exactly how the Jews used it.

And they themselves had presbyteries, where the word comes from in the New Testament usage therein. The early church followed a similar pattern in Acts 15, as I reviewed, I'll talk a little more about that as well, which is commonly known as a Jerusalem council. They got together to deal with matters across all of the churches of the early church age, New Testament there.

And the council, the governing body of the church leaders over the region, in this case, the region was everywhere. It dealt with problems common to all the churches, its decision was

narrow in scope, and its decision reflected a type of authority it had, ministerial authority, I pointed out as well, applying God's will to the church as needed. It was not magisterial, that is making up laws in the name of God.

We've never claimed that. The best of churches, whether independent or hierarchical, like the Episcopalian or something, have not claimed that. They say it's ministerial, that we're just trying to apply what God has given us to our particular circumstances.

That's the way we understand it as well. And since the leaders here and the Jerusalem council, Acts 15, even the apostles were under the kingship of Jesus, it can never be magisterial because Jesus hasn't given anybody that kind of power. He has that power.

He gives us the law. And as this was true for the highest court of the church in the New Testament era, the book of Acts, and I'm always reminded, because this is the way I grew up, and I'm not knocking them, they gave me a number of good things. And one thing was, what did the early church do? Let's go back to what they used to do.

What they used to do was they actually gathered together and made decisions for the entirety of all the churches, the Jerusalem council. And what we're pleading for as Presbyterians, that happens on a smaller scale. You can call it, and they have called it, a large presbytery.

It's the entire church. We're talking about a smaller presbytery, so between the local church and the highest assembly of the churches, the Jerusalem council in that case. So this is what we have here in Timothy's case, where they laid hands on him, not simply because they're elders, but because they are of a presbytery, as you hear in that word there as well, showing a kind of power and authority they had.

And it is this theme, the practice of Presbyterianism, would be the point of this sermon here. Last week, in other words, I argued for Presbyterianism upon the word of God, and now I'm arguing how it practices, how it works out in real life. So the practice of Presbyterianism, the first point, first of all, from the text itself, laying on of hands.

## **Practice of Presbyterianism**

What is going on here, pastor? What are they doing? It's kind of weird, especially a guy, don't touch me, stay away from me. That's not the idea here. The laying on of hands is a public declaration of a man for a church office, of laying aside or setting him aside publicly and telling the whole world, and the church in particular, of course, that we recognize this guy to have an authority that's unique to this office that other Christians do not have.

The custom of laying on of hands, of course, it's a visual way of showing identification and also mixed with the idea of a transfer, as it were, that this new officer is now one of the presbytery, of the elders collected together in this regional expression of power of the church, and they are acknowledging him by identifying with him as well, because he has now become one of them in terms of the office. Now this has Old Testament precedents with respect to the priesthood. They laid hands, if you recall, on animals.

The Jewish council, as one commentary points out, was composed of the elders of the church, the presbytery, Luke 22.66 and Acts 22.5, those are the two texts, and a presiding rabbi, what we would call a moderator, okay? So the Christian church was composed of apostles and elders and a president, Acts 15, right? James has stopped the discussion and he started giving a summary of the matter and they made a decision and he pronounced that decision. As the president of the synagogue was the same order as the presbyters, so the bishop was the same order as the presbyters, because they were sometimes called the bishop, the moderator, in this case James in Acts 15, that is in the ancient church. At the ordination of the president of the synagogue, there were always three presbyters present to lay on hands, so the early church canons required three bishops to be present at the consecration of a bishop.

He means early church, he doesn't mean New Testament, he means after the New Testament. But the rest of this is still relevant with respect to this text, because he's pointing out the synagogues had a presbytery, they had a regional collection of synagogues, elders, and they gathered together to deal with issues common amongst them, and one of the things they did, they lay hands on the guy they decided to make in their presence a fellow elder as well. So this is ordination, that's all we mean by this, the laying on hands, there's nothing magical about it, it's simply a public way of displaying a ceremony, we would say in today's vernacular, of this man now has his office of pastor.

But it's significant nevertheless, because what we're saying is you can't run around just calling yourself a pastor, which is a big problem, I think you know, in America. People just sit there and say, I started the church, I'm a pastor, please take my word for it. That's not what you have here.

Timothy submitted to other men who ordained him. I don't think we should be better than Timothy ourselves. Ordination elsewhere is in the New Testament, Paul and Barnabas ordained church officers or presbyters in several cities, Acts 14, 23.

Acts 14, 23, so when they had appointed elders or presbyters, right, it's a different word than presbytery, you can hear that in English, you can see it in the Greek as well very clearly, in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. So they had appointed, we see this similar action of appointing leadership elsewhere in Titus 1.5 as well. The implications of ordination or the laying on of hands is that you have to examine the man.

Do you think they sat there and said, Timothy looks like a good guy, let's make him a pastor? Well, wait a minute, what do you know about Timothy? I hear he's a good guy, let's make him a pastor. What? Or he's rich, let's make him a pastor. What? Now you know intuitively, naturally, if you're going to put somebody in a position of public authority, you better examine, you better look carefully at him.

And that's what the presbytery does by necessary implication. You have, of course, the requirement in 1 Timothy 3, this is what a bishop or a minister or a pastor or a parson, whatever you want to call them, must have these qualifications and gifts and abilities. Well, the church examines him, that's what we do in Presbyterianism, we don't pick your pastor, the local church picks their pastor.

But they can't pick their pastor by themselves, that's independency. They pick their pastor in conjunction with the presbytery, who also examines the man. Or as Triplex would say, it's a threefold contract, the church, the pastor, and the presbytery.

One of those breaks, the whole contract falls apart. You got to coordinate all three of them. So we read in 1 Timothy as well, do not lay hands on anyone hastily, he says, he writes to Timothy.

Don't run around quickly ordaining somebody just because it's kind of a cool thing to make new pastors. But of course, the implication being be careful in doing these things and the carefulness necessarily means some kind of examination. What that looks like differs, of course, it doesn't have to always be written, doesn't have to be verbal, it could be a large group, it could be a small group.

Those details are not given to us in the Word of God, but the implication is clear, given the qualifications, given the severity and the seriousness of the office, the severity in terms of God punishing people, pretending they're pastors when they're not, you better examine the guy and do it well. Secondly, so that's the laying on the hands, that's a power, that's an authority given to a regional collection of church officers over some churches to lay hands on them. Not just any Christian in the church, I can run around lay hands on you.

It's the presbytery in this case, for this significant reason. I may lay hands on you for other reasons because you're sick, I'm praying for you. People do that, that's not wrong.

But if they're running around laying hands and the significance of laying on hands is I'm making a new pastor, that's a problem. Presbytery does that, our regional collection of church leaders over local churches there. Layer of courts.

Now we all know about the court system, the American system that we've all grown up with and although we have problems with them and we see lots of bad things going on, we're thankful we have something there written down and we know people can go through the courts, you can get a lawyer, you can have a false verdict overturned. You probably know the stories of people at the last minute, the governor hears new evidence, the appellate court says this, we'll hear him and he gets overturned. And we're like, this is great, there's some justice, you can have a good balance, you can find the bad guys and you can preserve the good guys from false judgments because we know men are fallible.

And what's amazing to me, once I became a Presbyterian and one reason I suppose I became a Presbyterian, you have more rights of appeal to defend your good name if you have a false accusation against you in the American system than you have in churches. Churches that are independent, there's nowhere you can go. I have that leadership there that runs the church as heavy-handed, we say, lies about you, brings up false charges.

Who are you going to appeal to? You can't appeal to anybody because by definition they're independent from other churches. There's no appellate court. So they're okay having all this freedom as Americans but as Christians they're cramped down.

This is sad. I would argue we have more freedom in Christ than that. Again, under the best of all conditions.

So that's one way, brothers and sisters, because part of this instruction here of course is to give you some equipment and ways of thinking and talking to those who are not Presbyterian. That we're not crazy, we're not just running around making things up, you can actually see the word Presbytery here, go to the KJV, that's the translation of KJV, Presbytery, in 1 Timothy 4.14. And of course the other actions of the churches in the New Testament era. Now similarly you can hear of course about the convicted Christian and the like and the problems that they have that they can appeal and they can be protected and it has happened at times if you ask some people who've been in Presbyterianism for a long time.

And so we have checks and balances is one way of looking at it. And the early debates in the early 1800s of the Presbyterians and others because there was the rise of the independency at the time. People don't realize in 1776 the three largest denominations in early America was of course the Anglican and they were mostly in the middle colonies in the south somewhat.

The Congregationalists, they took over the entire north, that's what we know as the New England Puritans, right? And then the Presbyterians. We were the third largest denomination. Way fourth and fifth were the independents and the Baptists and whatnot.

Well they started growing in number during the Second Great Awakening in the 1800s because they were able to what? Run around willy-nilly making people pastors without examinations and the like, the Spirit of God told me, and so they can go out to the front range, back then would be the Appalachians, at the edge of civilization and get to the new towns and the new growth and start growing their churches before the Presbyterians got there. That's practically what happened. And in those debates what was interesting was our early church, our early fathers in Presbyterianism in the early 1800s, Dabney, Thornwell, Hodge, argued Presbyterianism is more or less a republic, an ecclesiastical republic is one of the titles of one of the books by Thomas Smith.

And I think it very much is, and this is one of them, appellate courts. Appellate courts are a good thing. Acts 15 is a good example of this, because again Acts 15 is one church over the entirety of what we call today a denomination, but they didn't have denominations, it was just one church, wasn't it? That's one of the problems that we have in a fallen world is we don't have one church anymore.

But they had this one thing called a general presbytery, because in this case it's a collection of church leaders over a bunch of churches, in this case all the churches as opposed to some of the churches, exercising godly authority. And they did, they gave them commands. You shouldn't do this and you shouldn't be eating that, for example.

Well Acts 15, where we had new converts arguing, the new Jewish converts arguing for the circumcision of the Gentiles. You want to be a good Christian? You've got to follow the Mosaic law. That's more or less what they were saying.

The apostles of course were arguing otherwise. And what's fascinating here to me again, is the apostles didn't say, thus saith the Lord, I'm an apostle, I've got the spirit of God, I can prophesy, shut up and sit down. No, they argued with the men, and then in the argument they're like, okay, we've got to make a Jerusalem council, get together with other presbyters, other elders that are not special offices like an apostle.

They couldn't do miracles, they couldn't, they didn't have a spirit of prophecy, they were just oh-hum guys with the apostles, made a decision for the church of God. That's, I think, very significant. In other words, they dealt with a matter that couldn't be dealt with locally, back and forth, back and forth.

It was breaking the unity of the body of Christ, and said we need to have a council, a large presbytery to gather together to decide these matters. The apostles said, yes, we will what? Submit to us. What they're doing by their actions, and in fact, as you recall, and I skipped that earlier because I talked about it last week, the apostles submitted to ordination.

Others laid hands on them. Presbytery did in Antioch. So, here we have a large-scale appellate court where they went straight to the top to deal with this specific matter.

You just read Acts 15 verses 1 and following. Go home and read that, and you'll see what was unfolding there, and pay attention closely what's happening. What's happening is a general assembly of people that independents can't wrap their head around because, by definition, they can't have one large assembly dealing with a bunch of independent churches because they're independent, which is unfortunate.

I think they would find much more great, greater strength and helpfulness in their Christian lives. That's the next part of my arguments in the sermon, so I won't get ahead of myself. Now, there's a natural principle here as well.

There's a natural, common-sense understanding of, well, sure, of course you're going to have some kind of collection for an appellate because, well, people err. It doesn't have to be outright sin. They just made a mistake in their judgment.

Serious mistake, of course, but it's a mistake, and so we need to have some kind of appellate court. Proverbs 24.6 tells us, in a multitude of counselors, there is safety. And people typically read that, at least in my experience, as, well, that's my local church.

I've got my pastor and a couple elders. On many churches, I always forget this, and a lot of the Baptist churches, not all of them, will have a pastor and deacons, which in our minds, in their practice, their deacons are our ruling elders. They call them deacons, but they're actually ruling elders.

It's really weird, but that's what they do. So you've got three guys. Is that a multitude of counselors? Kind of.

It's kind of a start there, but you know they may need even more help, and that's what an appellate court does. It's a multitude of counselors in this case, in a more formal sense, to be sure, but nevertheless. Now, there are common concerns, and I hinted at that when I went to Acts 15 to show as an appellate court, which is what it was acting like.

We have a dealing with issues here, and we can't handle it. We can't make a resolution, so we're going to go to a church council to make a resolution, like an appellate court. There are common concerns.

This was a common concern, of course. We have some of the new converts running around saying, you've got to be circumcised, and the apostles are saying, no, we don't know how to resolve this. We're going to resolve it.

It's a common issue to the entirety of the body in this case, and for a presbytery, the way we use it more narrowly, which is a smaller region as opposed to the entire church, but greater than a local church, they deal with common issues amongst those churches, common concerns, and this is what is needful if we are united in Christ. If you remember last week, I argued my starting position is there's one unified church, not just in terms of organically, that is, we're all members of the body of Christ, this is wonderful, this is great, but organizationally. The apostles were able to go to every church, and they ordained and set up local presbyteries, and presbyters, or ruling elders, and laid hands, and nominated, and elected them, and created them, ordained them, as I read in Acts 13.

You start from there. You've got the organization, and then you argue for some of the particulars. Independents, unfortunately, often argue from the independent church.

That's about as far as they go, just my local church, that's it. New Testament, when you read it with the eyes, like in 1 Corinthians 13, where there's multiple churches in one city, and Paul's writing to all of them and telling them what? You are one body in Christ, 1 Corinthians 12, and somebody has this gift, somebody has that gift. Look at it in the sense of a church.

One church has a series of gifts, the other church doesn't have it. It doesn't have to be read individually only, and so those are common concerns, or those common gifts as well, common matters. Diaconal load, for example, Paul talks about getting a collection to help those elsewhere from the church of Corinth at the chapter 16.

He says, I gather this stuff so we can help other churches. You can't do that if you're not organized together. How would I, I mean, certainly you would take money.

I would. Some random church across the world's here's some money, but usually they're not going to do that because they don't know you. Who are you? What kind of church are you? They want to examine you, want to make sure you're on the same page.

Where's this money going? That's good. You should be concerned. You shouldn't be just throwing money willy-nilly to any random church, but you can avoid those things if you're one church organizationally.

You're already on the same page. You have the same confession. Hey, we need help.

One of the things you do as a church is you help one another, not just within the church, but between churches, diaconal care. It's what the apostles did in 1 Corinthians 16. Oversight of local churches, of course, is part of this as well.

That presbytery, a collection, a regional collection of church leaders, each in their own church, of course, have oversight if that local church is getting out of hand. We have what's called a Sessional Oversight Committee, and usually, unfortunately, it's used just to go over minutes, but actually has a function. It expresses the presbytery that we're here to help you, and they do help.

That has helped. We have a conflict within the church. We can't deal with it, so the presbytery sends a little committee, Sessional Oversight Committee would be that committee, and help them do some counseling or go through the problem without having to go through a trial.

You don't always have to go through a trial. That's not what presbytery is always about, because every day, sit down, talk to one another. We need a third party arbitrator, perhaps, to deal with this matter because we're too emotional.

We're too involved in these things. One of the advantages, of course, on the side here is that you can have, ideally, more objectivity in a higher court. So, next, we have practical points of Presbyterianism.

## **Practical Points of Presbyterianism**

Practical points of Presbyterianism. I already talked a little bit about that, obviously. I pointed out some practical advantages of being united organizationally as a church.

The first one is, it's still about people. The first thing I want to say is, it's still about people. All governments, among men, all business models, all group associations like clubs, they're only as good as the people in there, aren't they? The quality is only as good as the quality of the people within the organization.

That, we cannot ignore. That, I will grant and highlight to us. But when all things are considered equal, if you have equally qualified people or godly or mature people in the government or in the church, because we're talking specifically about the church, then a good church government and a good people is the best combination.

I would argue the good church government is Presbyterianism. It's not top-down hierarchical as the Anglican or the Episcopal churches are, in which a lot of the rules and requirements and even your pastor is chosen by someone else and not you. We have the best of both worlds, I would argue, the best of independency and the best of some hierarchical that we have a layer of courts to appeal to, for example.

And of course, I'm not saying that non-Presbyterian churches are therefore not genuine churches. Of course they are. Any more than Christians who have a deficiency of practice and deficiency of doctrine are not true Christians.

Of course they are. They just have a deficiency. I mean, that's a nice way of saying it.

We should look down upon them, and that's not the point here. But I hope you see in some of these practical applications of Presbyterianism in everyday life, already one of them being

very obvious to me, I've seen it. You can appeal, you can be protected from heavy-handed local pastors, and they exist because the scandals pop up.

They tend to be in big mega churches or baptisters, but not exclusively. We have even some in the Presbyterians, but they're dealt with, it seems to me, praise be to God. Now, secondly, one way to look at the practical consequences and effects of Presbyterianism, it's about helping people.

The organization of the church is not created to hamper that approach, but to enhance and strengthen the ability to help one another, to help confuse leaders, taking them aside and better instructing them. You know as a child that that's hard to do with parents. It's better to find another parent to talk to a parent than a child to talk to a parent and take them aside, saying you're being too heavy-handed, right? We all know this.

And it's the same thing within the church. It's better to have another church leader come alongside the other church leader and say, we need to sit down and talk. And that's very, very hard to do if you're independent and have no organizational unity with that other pastor.

He's just some Tom, Dick, and Harry down the street who sees you being heavy-handed, too aggressive, making up laws, legalistic, and he can't take you aside because you're like, you're not my pastor. Oh wait, is that what Timothy's going to say to the presbytery? Do you think the laying on the hands of the presbytery means the eldership, the presbyters lay hands on Timothy and Timothy runs off and they don't care whatever he does from the rest of his ministry? You're on your own, you're independent, you can do your own thing. We credentialed you by laying hands and therefore identifying with your office, with our office, but afterwards we don't care.

You can drag our name in the mud, whatever. We are independent. Of course not.

There's a connection. There's a legal, that is organizational connection, but behind that is the moral connection that every Christian has that we're called to bring a brother or sister aside if need be, Galatians 6, to admonish one another. This is done in a more formal way between officers.

And that's very helpful, especially when it comes to theological topics because all kinds of pastors believe all kinds of crazy things in America, unfortunately. Helping captivated followers, not just confused leaders, but captivated followers. By examining ministers, of course, before the fact and keeping out false shepherds of false beliefs and false practices protect Christians, but after the fact because having churches and formal relationship with each other brings discipline and good order.

Again, with the best of people. 1 Corinthians 5.4, 1 Corinthians 5.4 highlights this fact. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that a spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are

unleavened. So here the churches there at Corinth, because there was more than one church, the Bible tells us, were not disciplining the members, that these were captivated followers, captivated to sin, and the leadership there was not helping them apparently.

So Paul stepped in and wrote this letter to urge them as a church officer who has authority in multiple places, as an apostle is very unique, of course. Now, this is very hard to do if they're not organized and dealt with in a proper manner. You can flee one local church jurisdiction to another in independency and do it often.

You can do it in Presbyterianism as well. It's a little harder. You can jump from one Presbyterian association to another, and if they're really not in agreement with one another, they'll just ignore the transfer.

If it's sin involved and whatever, I'll just take you anyways. But independents do it a lot more. It's very easy to run off.

You can't have this kind of discipline I read in 1 Corinthians 5.4. You're glorying in this. You're bragging about this bad relationship, as you recall, there in that chapter. I'm telling you, they ought to be disciplined.

You ought to gather together and discipline them. And that discipline, therefore, by implication, must hold in every church they go to. That helps that Christian.

Because church discipline isn't about exercising my power upon you, but exercising the power of Christ to the purging of your soul if you're in gross public sin. And if you can run off because of independency, unfortunately, and go to pick any church you want, or bad Presbyterianism gone bad, that's not good. That's not going to help you.

There's no help there. You're going to be able to be covered. You're going to ignore your sins, and the other church ignores your sins, and, well, I don't care about that church.

They had the wrong ruling. Well, let's talk about it. What's the wrong ruling? They don't even talk to you.

They just take the people, and that's the end of it. They're not going to help you. You don't want to go to that kind of a church.

You want a church that cares about what has happened in your prior church, if you're in a good relationship or a bad relationship. So these are ways in which we help leaders. We help followers and believers.

And that they who are in times of need, but not just help them in the negative sense, again, of courts and the like, but also positively of other practical effects, that we are here to help one another with wisdom and peace. So again, in Proverbs 24.6, we read in the multitude of counselors, there is safety. And so with respect to questions of conscience, with respect to questions of what sayeth the Lord and the like, it is helpful to have more than just your local pastor sometimes.

I can't know everything. I have to read other pastors. They're called theologians from 100, 200, 300 years ago.

They passed on to the Lord and just left me some books. It's better if I have another human as well, someone with much age and experience, an older pastor. And that's hard to find otherwise, unless you were organized in such a way that, hey, I have a relative trust that the presbytery next door to us within the OPC has examined their men.

And this guy's 65. He's been around the block for a long time, and I can go talk to him and give me some experience here and give you experience. And so that's what we do.

And that's one of the practical effects of having a multitude of counselors beyond the local church and the like. Other ways include strength and cooperation, though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a three-fold cord is not quickly broken, Ecclesiastes 4.12. So he's arguing there, Solomon is, that, you know, if someone comes after you, it's best if it's two against one.

It's even stronger when it's three against one. Well, imagine if it's 10 against one or 1,000 against one. If you had a denomination in which you coordinated your officers, coordinated their abilities and their strengths, not just the officers, but members therein as well, because the members can help outside the local church.

We're not saying don't ever help the local OPC over here or whatever. You might be an assistance in your own way. But it's even more useful when you're already organized because you already know that church, you trust them implicitly, the leadership, they're not going to waste your time and your talents, and you can help the people when they say this person really needs help, because you've got that credential system going on.

You have credentials, we just don't think of it that way. One way or the other, we just formalize it, Presbyterianism. And so one, two, three men, all the more can therefore in strength and cooperation help one another, Romans 15.2. Romans 15.2 is the last verse I'll go over.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification or building up. And I'll submit to you again, because it's written very generally, written to the Church of Rome, probably multiple churches of Rome.

We've seen that Antioch, seen that Jerusalem, we've seen that Corinth, why not Rome? Helping one another doesn't have to be just a local church. You have cooperative events. We've done that here in Denver, between the churches, because we're on the same denomination, we have the same confession, we know the same kind of practices.

You're not going to surprise me, something weird coming up, I hope, in comparison to independency, where every church, you don't know what's going on. I don't know them. They may be the greatest guys in the world, but I don't know them.

Why should I assume that when you have lots of bad scandals, even in Presbyterian churches, it could be bad. Let each of us please his neighbor. And one way to please the neighbor is with pastors and elders, helping not just the church, but one another.

When I go to Presbyterian, we're going to Presbyterian in a few weeks, with Bob, we are not simply thinking of this church. Now we're going to think about other churches. How can we help them as well? And they submit, because they're making a covenant, they're in agreement with us, they're in the same denomination, to that kind of help.

That is, they implicitly trust us, and if they need some advice, they need some material aid, because we deal with funds as well, they can come to us at the Presbyterian level, if it's more than they can handle locally. There are diagonal concerns that are greater than a local church, especially small churches, when, what is it, 80% of American churches are small anyways. You can't help somebody, but you can if there's three or four of you together.

And it's easier to do when you're already on the same page, you already know that each other's ordination, you've seen the exams. But if you're strange churches, it's a lot harder. It can be done, I'm not saying independents can't do it, it's a lot harder.

Why does all this matter? I could say more. I'm getting ahead, unfortunately, time's getting ahead of me. Why it all matters.

One, helping one another in need should always matter. And if we have abundance of ability in a local church, why not exercise that, if possible, with other churches? And the best, of course, would be those already in the same orbit as us, our Presbyterian. Preserving the good name of Jesus among preachers.

We don't want any man just to be a pastor, but one who's carefully ordained and like and examined, so that he is not going to slander God's name and bring scandal upon his church. Unfortunately, in the American system, we tend to think that's just that church. No, that church, even if it's independent, still reflects upon you and the greater society.

They just see a church. They don't know the difference between independent Presbyterians. They see a bad church or a bad leader.

They see a bad Presbytery, same thing. And we're zealous to maintain and avoid such a scandal and preserve Christ's good name. And lastly, because Christ is king of the church, and he shows us by divine example in command, there are Presbyteries.

And there are large Presbyteries called a council in this case, Jerusalem Council. And we ought to therefore imitate them unless we have evidence to the contrary. And there is no evidence to the contrary.

There's every good reason to follow these examples. Let's pray to God and thank him that he has given us enough understanding of his word that we can organize our churches in accordance to his will. Let us pray.

Indeed, God above, we're thankful for your word and that we have the very word Presbytery here, the KJV, to tell us this is more than just a couple of ruling elders or pastors

or Presbyterians coming together, God, but a regional collection of them with a certain authority that's distinct from them as such. We pray and ask God above that you would help us to further contemplate and think in ways in which we can help one another here, and certainly to pray, to be aware. That's one of the advantages, again, in which we are informed at the Presbytery meetings of the prayers and praises of the saints of the regional collection of churches known as the Presbytery of Dakotas.

Our God and Savior, help us to this end to do what we can to help one another, preserve the good name of Jesus, and to submit to our Lord and Savior. Amen.