

Apostles & Bishops –

BIBLE STUDY CLASS #1

Understanding Biblical Church Governance (Instructor's Guide)

Lesson Outline & Instructor's Notes

Introduction (5-10 minutes)

Discussion Social Media Post:

"THIS IS SURE TO GET ME IN TROUBLE, BUT IT IS A HISTORIC TRUTH"

Apostles are Ascension gifts, but the gifts are given to people and are not referred to as an office. The ministry gifts of Ephesians chapter 4 are yet available in the 21st century, but there is great confusion over how they are administered, what is their function, what, if any, jurisdiction they may have in governance, and how they fall in the ordo [order] of the church, if at all?

WE NEED TO HAVE ORDER IN THE HOUSE OF GOD INSTEAD OF CULTURAL CREATIONS OF HIERARCHY IN THE CHURCH. THESE PROTOCOLS (a word that involves more than the costume of the clergy) WERE ONCE ESTABLISHED IN TRADITION AND HAVE NOW BEEN MADE OF NO EFFECT.

EVERYONE WANTING TO LOOK IMPORTANT OR RELEVANT TO THE MINISTRY IS WEARING EVERYTHING, AND THERE IS CONFUSION.

HOW DO WE PROCEED AS THE CHURCH WITHOUT KNOWING WHO IS WHO AND WHAT AN INSIGNIA, RANK, TITLE, OR VESTMENT MEANS? THE GREEK WORD APOSTOLOS MEANS, "SENT ONE."

THE ANCIENT CONNOTATION MEANS ONE WHO IS SENT TO ESTABLISH FOOTHOLDS IN TERRITORIES FOR A SOVEREIGN LORD SO THAT WHEN HE ARRIVES, HE IS STANDING ON LAND HE WON.

THE MODEL OF THE APOSTOLIC THAT IS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IS THAT OF PAUL, WHOSE APOSTLESHIP WAS NEVER "AFFIRMED". HE NEVER REMAINED THE PERMANENT PASTOR OF ANY CHURCH HE FOUNDED BUT TURNED THEM OVER TO OTHERS WHO IN TIME DEVELOPED A GOVERNMENT WITH OVERSIGHT NOW CALLED THE EPISCOPACY (RULE OF THE BISHOPS). +DJD

Opening Scripture: *Ephesians 2:20* – “Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

Instructor's Notes:

Q Ask: What do you think is the difference between an apostle and a bishop?

Expected Responses:

- Some may say apostles are higher in rank than bishops.
- Others may say bishops govern the church today.
- Some may express uncertainty about the distinction.

ANSWER Apostles were foundational leaders who planted churches, whereas bishops (episkopoi) were overseers of local congregations.

- Historical Shift: Over time, bishops became the governing authority, replacing the apostolic function in many traditions.

II. Understanding Ascension Gifts & Church Governance

Define Ascension gifts: These are gifts Christ gave to the church at His ascension, as described in *Ephesians 4:11* – “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

These gifts are not personal achievements but divine callings to equip the saints for the work of ministry and to strengthen the church. Each of these gifts serves a vital role in the body of Christ, and together, they form a complete picture of church leadership and function.

Explain the term 'office' vs. function: The term office is commonly used in church traditions to describe leadership roles, implying a structured, hierarchical position similar to governmental or organizational leadership. Biblically, these roles are better understood as functions rather than static offices.

Office (Institutional Perspective):

Often denotes a title or position within a structured religious organization.

Implies an appointment that comes with a formal rank, hierarchy, or authority.

In some traditions, an office can be held for life or through formal consecration (e.g., bishop, archbishop, cardinal, pope).

- Officeholders may derive authority from an institution rather than spiritual gifting.

Function (Biblical Perspective):

- Describes a divinely assigned role in the church that is meant to be carried out rather than simply held as a title.

- The word *doma* (Greek for "gift") in Ephesians 4:11 refers to a spiritual endowment given to individuals to serve the Body of Christ, rather than a formal position.

- Biblical examples show that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers operated in their roles dynamically, equipping and empowering the church rather than ruling over it.

- Unlike an office, which may be inherited or conferred by human appointment, function is based on spiritual calling and empowerment by God.

Example: Paul never referred to himself as "holding the office of an apostle" but instead emphasized that he was called to function as an apostle by the will of God (Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1). Nowhere in the New Testament do bishops or elders rule over

apostles. Instead, apostles set in place leadership structures, including bishops (overseers) and elders.

Similarly, apostles appointed elders (*presbyteroi*) and overseers (*episkopoi*) based on function rather than institutional rank (Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23).

III. Apostles in the Bible (15-20 minutes)

1. The Role of Apostles

1 Corinthians 12:28 – “And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers…”

Instructor’s Explanation: This ranking emphasizes function, not superiority. Apostles are foundational, prophets bring divine revelation, and teachers establish doctrine.

Acts 15:1-29 (Jerusalem Council)

Instructor’s Explanation:

- The apostles made doctrinal decisions for the church, not bishops.
- The council, led by apostles and elders, decided how to integrate Gentiles into the faith.

Apostles Appointing Elders & Bishops

- **Acts 14:23** – “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church…”
- Apostles had the authority to appoint elders (*presbyteroi*), who later developed into bishops in church governance.
- Nowhere does Scripture show elders or bishops appointing or ruling over apostles.
- **Titus 1:5** – “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”
- Paul (an apostle) directed Titus to appoint elders, confirming apostolic authority over church governance

Example: Today, major church decisions are often made by councils, synods, or bishops, yet in the early church, apostles led these discussions.

Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23

Instructor's Explanation: Paul appointed elders in every city, demonstrating apostolic authority over church governance. Elders (later called bishops) were responsible for overseeing the local church, not governing the entire Body of Christ.

Discussion Question:

Why do you think the apostles appointed local leaders instead of staying as pastors?

Instructor's Answer:

- Apostles had a mission to expand the Gospel beyond one location.
- Pastors and bishops were needed to maintain local congregations while apostles continued planting churches.
- Example: Paul established churches but left leaders like Timothy and Titus to oversee them.

IV. Bishops in the Bible (15-20 minutes)

Bishops in the Early Church

Bishops as Local Overseers, Not Supreme Authorities

- The term *episkopos* (bishop) originally meant "overseer," referring to those responsible for local congregations, not a hierarchical authority over apostles.
- In **Philippians 1:1**, Paul greets "the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers (*episkopoi*) and deacons."
- Notice he does not place bishops above apostles or even call them the governing authority—just overseers of local congregations.

- **1 Timothy 3:1-7** describes the qualifications of a bishop (overseer), focusing on character and management of a household, not supreme governance over the church.
- **1 Peter 5:1-4** describes bishops/elders as *shepherds*, not rulers, and warns against lording authority over the flock.

Acts 15:1-29 (The Jerusalem Council)

- The apostles, led by James (not as a bishop, but as a leading apostle in Jerusalem), made doctrinal decisions for the early church.
- Bishops or local overseers were not the final decision-makers; it was the apostles and elders collectively.

Bishops as Overseers, Not Rulers of Apostles

- The term *bishop* (*episkopos*) in the early church referred to an overseer, responsible for local church governance and pastoral care.
- The apostolic function remained broader—governing multiple churches, establishing new works, and ensuring doctrinal integrity.
- Bishops later became more institutionalized, particularly with the rise of hierarchical church governance in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, but this was not the original biblical model.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110 AD) & the Rise of the Bishop's Role

- Ignatius (bishop of Antioch) was one of the first to strongly advocate for a singular bishop over a church rather than shared leadership among elders.
- He emphasized that the bishop should be obeyed as one would obey God (which later influenced Catholicism).
- This was not biblical doctrine but rather a **church structure that developed over time** due to the need for unity.

Discussion Question:

What happens when a church prioritizes institutional hierarchy over biblical leadership?

Instructor's Answer:

The church can become more about structure than spiritual movement.

Apostolic function can be suppressed in favor of man-made hierarchy.

Example: The Catholic and Orthodox churches elevated bishops to supreme authority, leading to centralized church rule rather than Spirit-led governance.

V. Closing

The Shift in Authority

- **Ignatius of Antioch (110 AD)** – Advocated for singular bishop rule.
- **Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** – Officially established bishops as ruling authorities.
- **Roman Catholic Church Influence** – Apostleship was phased out, and bishops became the highest governing officials.

The Shift from Apostolic Leadership to Bishop Rule

1. **2nd-3rd Century** – As churches grew and apostles were no longer present, bishops started centralizing authority.
2. **Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** – Established bishops as key governing figures in the church, while the apostolic function was no longer officially recognized.
3. **Roman Catholic Influence** – Over time, the **Papal system** developed, where bishops (eventually the Pope) became the highest governing authorities, and apostles were considered a historical role rather than a continuing function.

4. **Reformation & Pentecostal Movements** – The Protestant Reformation rejected the supremacy of bishops, but it wasn't until the **Pentecostal & Charismatic Movements (20th century)** that the role of modern apostles was restored in some circles.

Post-Apostolic Church Development

- The early church saw a shift where bishops took on greater centralized authority, particularly under the influence of figures like Ignatius of Antioch (who emphasized the role of the bishop for church unity).
- By the time of Constantine and the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), bishops became institutional heads, leading to a structure where apostolic function was diminished in favor of ecclesiastical order.

While bishops have an essential role in pastoral oversight, apostles were and still are foundational leaders in the body of Christ. The idea that bishops rule over apostles is a later church development, not a biblical mandate. If anything, apostles should provide oversight and guidance to bishops and other leaders in the broader ecclesiastical structure.

Final Analysis: Bishops Do Not Rule Over Apostles

- **Biblically, apostles hold foundational authority** (Ephesians 2:20, 1 Corinthians 12:28).
- **Bishops were established for local church oversight**, but they were not intended to rule over apostles.
- **Historically, bishops gained ruling authority due to institutional developments**, not scriptural mandate.
- **In the modern church, apostolic leadership should be properly recognized** without reducing it to a subordinate role under bishops.

Key Takeaways:

Where Do Bishops Fit?

- Bishops provide oversight but should not replace apostolic leadership.
- Apostles govern; bishops shepherd.

1. Apostles have foundational authority, while bishops serve as overseers.
2. The shift from apostolic leadership to bishop rule was historical, not biblical.
3. Churches today must balance biblical structure with practical governance.

Prophetic Assignment:

Ask God to restore proper governance in His church.

Pray for apostles, prophets, and leaders to work together in unity.

The Difference Between the Apostolic Gift and the Apostolic Office

The distinction between the **gift** of an apostle and the **office** of an Apostle lies in their function, authority, and calling. While both are apostolic in nature, their roles and levels of responsibility differ. Below is a detailed breakdown:

1. The Apostolic Gift (Function)

The **apostolic gift** is one of the ministry gifts given by Christ to the church for its growth, expansion, and establishment.

Key Characteristics of the Apostolic Gift:

- Given as a **grace gift (charisma)** to individuals for kingdom expansion.
- *Ephesians 4:11-12* – “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”
- This shows that apostleship, like prophecy and teaching, is a spiritual gift given for equipping others.
- **It is a calling but does not necessarily mean one has governmental authority over churches.**
- Many people function apostolically (pioneering new ministries, planting churches) without being in an official apostolic office.
- **Recognized by fruit rather than title.**
- An individual may be a missionary, church planter, or movement leader and still function apostolically without using the title “Apostle.”
- **Operates in different capacities within the church.**
- *1 Corinthians 12:28* – “And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers…”
- This suggests a **functional role** where apostles serve within a broader leadership structure.

- Seen in various leadership roles.
 - Paul and Barnabas were sent out (apostello) in *Acts 13:2-3*, which aligns with the apostolic function of pioneering new works.
 - Missionaries, church planters, and leaders who disciple and expand ministries often have this gift.
-

2. The Apostolic Office (Governmental Authority)

The **office of an Apostle** is a distinct, authoritative role given by Christ to foundationally establish and govern the church.

Key Characteristics of the Apostolic Office:

- Directly appointed by Christ or through divine calling.
- *Luke 6:13* – “When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.”
- The Twelve held a unique **governing authority** as those directly chosen by Christ.
- Carries a foundational role in establishing doctrine.
- *Ephesians 2:20* – “Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”
- The **Apostolic Office** had a **doctrinally foundational role**, shaping the theology of the early church.
- Has governing authority over churches and ministers.
- *Titus 1:5* – Paul tells Titus, “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town.”
- Apostles in **the office** do not just plant churches but set up governmental order and appoint leaders.

- Can exercise discipline and correction.
- *2 Corinthians 10:8* – “For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it.”
- This **authority** was given to correct, rebuke, and establish order in the church.
- May receive divine revelations for the body of Christ.
- Paul had direct revelations from Jesus (*Galatians 1:11-12*), distinguishing him from others with the apostolic gift.
- Oversees multiple churches or ministries.
- Apostles in the office function as spiritual fathers/mothers, providing oversight to entire church networks.

3. Key Differences Between the Apostolic Gift & Apostolic Office

Aspect	Apostolic Gift (Function)	Apostolic Office (Governmental Authority)
Definition	A spiritual gift to build and expand the church.	A governing office with divine authority to establish doctrine and oversee churches.
Authority Level	Influences and pioneers' ministries.	Governs, establishes doctrine, and provides oversight.
Appointment	Given by grace to individuals operating in apostolic function.	Appointed directly by Christ or through divine calling.
Biblical Example	Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1).	The Twelve Apostles (Luke 6:13), Paul (Gal. 1:1).
Role	Church planting, pioneering, expanding the kingdom.	Overseeing churches, establishing doctrine, providing leadership governance.
Use of Title	Often does not require the title “Apostle.”	Often recognized as an Apostle due to the scope of responsibility.
Primary Purpose	Strengthen and equip the body of Christ.	Set order, establish leaders, correct doctrine.

4. Practical Application: How Does This Apply Today?

1. Many operate in an apostolic gift but do not hold the office.

- A church planter, missionary, or movement leader may function **apostolically** without the **governing authority** of an Apostle.
- Example: A missionary planting churches globally may not be an **Apostle in office** but operates in the **gift** of apostleship.

2. Some are called to an apostolic office and govern networks.

- These individuals carry **spiritual authority** over churches and leaders, ensuring doctrinal alignment.
- Example: An Apostle over a network of churches trains leaders, appoints pastors, and provides oversight.

3. The apostolic office carries greater responsibility.

- Those who hold the **office** must ensure doctrinal purity and establish order.
- Example: Paul's letters to churches addressed issues of heresy, leadership structure, and Christian living.

4. Not everyone with an apostolic gift should use the title "Apostle."

- While many function apostolically, using the title should be based on divine confirmation and recognition from others in the body of Christ.
- *Proverbs 27:2* – "Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips."

5. Questions for Self-Reflection:

- Do I function in an apostolic gift, or do I carry an apostolic office?
- Has God confirmed my apostolic calling through spiritual authority and fruit?
- Am I called to plant and pioneer, or to govern and establish order?
- Do I have oversight over churches and leaders, or do I focus on expansion and equipping?

- Do I sense a call to take on greater spiritual responsibility in governing the church?
-

Final Summary

1. The **Apostolic Gift** is a **spiritual function** that helps build, expand, and equip the church.
2. The **Apostolic Office** is a **governing role** with authority to oversee, establish, and correct churches.
3. Both are valid and essential, but not everyone who functions apostolically is called to the office.
4. Those in the office of Apostle carry a higher responsibility before God to steward the church properly.

BIBLE STUDY CLASS #3

What Did Constantine Have to Gain by Taking Over Christianity?

Constantine politically co-opted Christianity, institutionalized it, and merged it with the Roman government,

The phrase “taking over Christianity” might not be the most precise way to describe what Constantine and Ignatius of Antioch did. A more accurate description would be that Constantine politically co-opted Christianity, institutionalized it, and merged it with the Roman government, while Ignatius of Antioch (who lived earlier, around 110 AD) contributed to the centralization of church leadership under bishops.

Constantine did use Christianity for political and strategic gains, so let's explore what he gained and why he made these moves.

1. Constantine's Motives for Embracing Christianity

✓ Political Stability & Unification

- The Roman Empire was fractured by internal conflicts and rival religions.
- Constantine saw Christianity as a way to unify his empire under one faith.
- Unlike Roman paganism, Christianity had strong community structures that promoted loyalty.
- By supporting Christianity, he gained the support of its growing number of followers.

✓ Consolidation of Power

- Constantine fought against rival emperors in civil wars.
- Before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312 AD), he reportedly had a vision of a Christian symbol (Chi-Rho) and the phrase “In this sign, conquer.”
- After winning, he publicly attributed his victory to the Christian God, giving him a divine mandate to rule.
- His endorsement of Christianity helped solidify his claim to the throne.

✓ Control Over Religious Leaders

- Christianity was once **persecuted**, but now bishops **owed their status to Constantine**.
- By funding churches, appointing bishops, and influencing theology, Constantine **gained control over Christian leadership**.
- The **Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** was **organized by Constantine** to settle theological disputes, especially the **Arian controversy**.
- The Nicene Creed was **not just a statement of faith but also a political tool** to create **uniformity** in the empire.


Economic & Military Benefits

- Christians were a **growing population**, and Constantine **secured their loyalty** by legalizing their faith (Edict of Milan, 313 AD).
- Many Christians **joined the military**, strengthening Constantine's forces.
- The church received **tax exemptions and imperial financial support**, making it a powerful economic force.

Rebranding of Rome's Image

- **Pagan Rome was in decline**, and Constantine wanted to **reshape the empire's identity**.
- By aligning himself with Christianity, he **cast himself as a "God-appointed ruler"**, reinforcing his authority.
- **Pagan temples were converted into churches**, showing Rome's shift from **polytheism to monotheism**.

2. Did Constantine Truly Convert to Christianity?

 There is debate about whether Constantine was a true Christian or just a political opportunist.

- He was **baptized only on his deathbed** in 337 AD, raising suspicions.
- He still **participated in some pagan rituals** and kept the title **Pontifex Maximus** (chief priest of Roman religion).
- Some historians believe **he saw Christianity as a tool for power rather than a personal faith**.

 Possible Evidence for Genuine Faith:

- He funded churches and Christian welfare programs.
- He made **Sunday a legal day of rest** in honor of the Christian God.
- He pushed for **moral reforms** that aligned with Christian values.

 Possible Evidence Against Genuine Faith:

- He kept **statues of Roman gods** and didn't fully abandon pagan traditions.
- He executed his wife and son, **which contradicted Christian teachings**.
- His political actions often seemed more about **consolidating power than spreading the Gospel**.

3. Did Ignatius of Antioch Also Contribute to the "Takeover" of Christianity?

- ◆ Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110 AD) lived 200 years before Constantine and was not involved in Roman politics.
- ◆ However, he **did contribute to the shift from apostolic leadership to episcopal leadership**.
- ◆ He was one of the **first Christian leaders to advocate for a single bishop ruling over each church**, rather than a group of elders (presbyters).

- ◆ His writings emphasized **submission to bishops** as a sign of obedience to God.
 - ◆ While his intent was likely to **preserve church unity**, his ideas helped lay the foundation for **hierarchical church structures**, which later allowed **Constantine to exert control over Christianity**.
-

4. Final Analysis: Did Constantine “Take Over” Christianity?

A More Accurate Summary:

Instead of saying Constantine “**took over**” Christianity, it is more precise to say that he **politically co-opted and institutionalized Christianity** for the benefit of the Roman Empire.

What He Gained:

- ✓ **Political control** over a rapidly growing religious movement.
- ✓ **A unified empire** under one religion instead of religious division.
- ✓ **Increased military strength** by recruiting Christian soldiers.
- ✓ **Economic benefits** through tax exemptions and financial ties to the church.
- ✓ **Moral legitimacy** as a “God-appointed” ruler.

What Christianity Lost:

- ⚠ **Apostolic leadership diminished**, replaced by bishops with political power.
- ⚠ **Increased governmental influence over church doctrine** (e.g., the Nicene Creed was politically motivated).
- ⚠ **The beginning of church-state entanglement**, leading to later corruption (e.g., the medieval papacy).
- ⚠ **A move toward religious hierarchy**, influenced by Roman imperial structures.

5. Discussion Questions for Bible Study

With Answer Key

1. Why did Constantine embrace Christianity?

Answer: He saw it as a way to unify the empire, gain political control, and strengthen his military.

2. What was the Edict of Milan, and why was it important?

Answer: Issued in 313 AD, it **legalized Christianity** and ended persecution.

3. Did Constantine truly convert to Christianity?

Answer: Some believe he did, but others argue he used Christianity for political gain since he was baptized only on his deathbed.

4. What was the Council of Nicaea, and how did Constantine influence it?

Answer: It was a gathering of Christian bishops in 325 AD to settle theological disputes; Constantine convened it and ensured a **politically favorable outcome**.

5. How did Ignatius of Antioch contribute to the changing structure of church leadership?

Answer: He was one of the first to promote a **single bishop ruling over each church**, which laid the foundation for **hierarchical church government**.

6. What are some negative consequences of Constantine's involvement in Christianity?

Answer: The church became politically entangled, bishops gained too much power, and apostolic leadership declined.

7. Do you think Christianity would have spread as widely without Constantine's influence? Why or why not?

(Open-ended discussion question)

6. Conclusion

- ✔ Constantine helped spread Christianity, but he also transformed it into an institutionalized religion that mirrored the Roman Empire.
- ✔ While his influence ended persecution and expanded the church, it also centralized power and altered church governance.
- ✔ Christianity moved from a Spirit-led movement to a state-controlled institution, setting the stage for the later Roman Catholic Church structure.