

Syllabus: ----- Baptist Ecclesiology & Polity

RTS, Atlanta

PROFESSOR

Jonathan Leeman (Ph.D., Wales)

Jonathan@9Marks.org

President, 9Marks; Adjunct Professor, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary;
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Elder, Cheverly Baptist Church

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The goal of this course is to provide a biblical, theological, and practical explanation of the church from a Baptist perspective. Particular attention will be given to understanding congregational rule within canonical perspective, the relationship between congregational rule and elder leadership, a baptistic understanding of the ordinances, and how these polity distinctives are conducive to a culture of discipleship.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The lectures include the following objectives:

1. Establish the nature of institutional authority and how to read the Bible with an institutional hermeneutic. What is a divine institution and what is a human institution, and how do we establish the line between matters of principle and matters of prudence? For the gathered church, what is required and what is permitted?
2. Establish the covenantal and kingdom basis of the local church, which will help us to view the local church, in its institutional essence, as God's eschatological embassy on earth whose purpose is to represent the gospel. Particular attention will be given to the keys of the kingdom and their role in membership and discipline, as well as their connection to the Lord's Supper and baptism.
3. Explore the nature of congregational authority, elder authority, and their relationship with one another. It will be argued that congregationalism best connects faith and order, the gospel and church government. But then the question will be asked, how does congregationalism work in the context of pastoral or elder

leadership? Answering this necessitates a better understanding of the nature and limits of elder authority.

4. Make the case for a baptistic understanding of the ordinances over and against other perspectives.
5. Consider why the multisite and service models fundamentally alter the nature of a church.
6. Articulate a philosophy of ministry that rests on the conviction of Scripture's sufficiency. Emphasis to be given to the mutual work of Word and Spirit through the public and private proclamation of God's Word.
7. Describe the nature and responsibilities of the church member. What does daily life look like for the individual Christian in relationship to his or her local church?
8. Explore the ways in which biblical principles can be fleshed out in differing cultural contexts. Must the church look the same everywhere?

REQUIRED READINGS

The following texts are required:

Dever, Mark, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* (B&H).

Excerpts from Mark Dever and Caleb Morrell, *Baptist Polity: A Historical Reader* (Crossway, forthcoming): email the professor for electronic copy.

- Benjamin Keach, *The Glory of a True Church and its Discipline Displayed* (1697)
- John Gill, "Of External Worship" from *Body of Practical Divinity* (1770)
- James A. Spurgeon, "Discipline at the Church of the Metropolitan Tabernacle" (1869)

Jamieson, Bobby, *Understanding Baptism* (Nashville: B&H, 2016)

_____. *Understanding the Lord's Supper* (Nashville: B&H, 2016)

Jonathan Leeman's "Doctrine of the Church":

- _____. "The Old Testament Background to a Doctrine of the Church," in the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, edited by D. A. Carson, Gregory Beale, Benjamin Gladd, Andrew Naselli. (Baker, 2020): request by email from professor.
- _____. "A Congregational View of One, Holy, and Apostolic," in Dever, Mark and Jonathan Leeman, eds. *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*. Nashville: B&H, 2015.
- _____. "[What Is Catholicity and What Does it Require.](#)" in *Church Matters: Catholicity*, vol. 3.
- _____. "[A Baptist View of the Royal Priesthood of All Believers.](#)" in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 23.1 (2019), 22 pages.

- _____. [“The Church: Universal and Local,”](#) essay at The Gospel Coalition, 7 pages.
- _____. *One Assembly: Rethinking the Multisite and Multiservice Church Model* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming, 2020).
- _____. *Don’t Fire Your Church Members: A Case for Congregationalism*. B&H, 2016.
- _____. [“The Relationship of Church and State,”](#) essay at The gospel Coalition, 10 pages.
- _____. “Baptists in Babylon: On the Role of Politics in Modern Baptist Life,” in *Baptist Political Theology*, edited by Thomas Kidd, Paul Miller, and Andrew Walker (B&H Academic, 2023).

ASSIGNMENTS

A student’s grade for this course depends entirely upon the following essays:

1. *Reading assignments (60 points—10 points per essay)*

Each student is expected to complete all the readings. They must then write a 500-word essay (give or take 50 words) for each of the following readings: Dever, Keach, Gill, Spurgeon, Jamieson (booth books in one essay), Leeman (Don’t Fire).

The 600 words should be broken down as follows: one-third to one-half summary and one-half to two-thirds critical engagement. A good summary doesn’t simply recite the table of content, but summarizes the point and scope of the book.

2. *Final exam questions (40 points—5 points each)—open book*

Each student must write 300 words (give or take 50 words) answering each of the following questions:

- What is the local church?
- How is Baptist doctrine a completion of the Protestant Reformation?
- Why is polity important, and what is the relationship between the gospel and polity (faith and order)?
- What is the relationship between the Lord’s Supper and church membership? And why is carefully practicing church membership and discipline critical to the growth of the saints and the church’s work of evangelism? (Spend roughly the same number of words on these two questions.)
- Relative to other forms of church government, how is congregationalism most conducive to cultivating a culture of discipleship? (If you don’t believe that it is, present both sides of the argument.)
- What is the relationship between congregational authority and the elders’ authority?
- What is baptism? Should we baptize infants? Why or why not?
- Is the multisite or service model biblically allowable? Defend your position.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION STYLE AND FORMAT

Please place all assignments into one Word document or PDF to be emailed to Jonathan Leeman upon completion. New Times Roman, 11 or 12 point font. Begin each assignment on a new page. One title page for the entire document is sufficient. Indent new paragraphs. No spaces between paragraphs. Single or single and a half space. Include both page numbers and your name in the header, so that it appears on every page.

GRADING SCALE and DUE DATE

Grades will be assigned in accordance with the RTS Catalogue:

A (97-100) 4.00; A- (94-96) 3.66; B+ (91-93) 3.33; B (88-90) 3.00; B- (86-87) 2.66; C+ (83-85) 2.33; C (80-82) 2.00; C- (78-79) 1.66; D+ (75-77) 1.33; D (72-74) 1.00; D- (70-71) 0.66; F (below 70) 0.00; I (incomplete); W (withdraw); S (satisfactory); P (passing)

ALL Assignments are due February 28, 2026.

ATTENDANCE & ZOOM POLICY

Students are expected to attend the entirety of the lectures.

That said, your professor may allow you to Zoom into class or watch Zoom recordings for excused absences based on the professor's discretion and subject to the availability of equipment. Students should contact their professor well in advance of the class meeting. For a third absence the Registrar should be consulted. Your professor may require additional interactive assignments to offset the absence of classroom interaction. Sync or Remote Live courses have priority for the limited Zoom equipment.

EXTENSION POLICY

All assignments and exams are to be completed by the deadlines announced in this syllabus or in class.

Extensions for assignments and exams due within the normal duration of the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. Extensions of two weeks or less beyond the date of the last deadline for the course must be approved beforehand by the Professor. A grade penalty may be assessed.

Extensions of greater than two weeks but not more than six weeks beyond the last deadline for the course may be granted in extenuating circumstances (i.e. illness, family emergency). For an extension of more than two weeks the student must request an Extension Request Form from the Registrar's Office. The request must be approved by the Professor and the Academic Dean. A grade penalty may be assessed. (RTS Catalog p. 46 and RTS Atlanta

Student Handbook p. 18)

Any incompletes not cleared six weeks after the last published due date for course work will be converted to a failing grade. Professors may have the failing grade changed to a passing grade by request. (RTS Catalog p. 49)

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

<u>MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u>	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong • Moderate • Minimal • None 	
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	Students must understand and preach the doctrine of the church such that they can teach their congregations.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	Scriptural justification is required for the doctrinal concepts articulated in this class. Students are expected to engage in exegetical studies.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	This course builds a baptistic ecclesiology on the covenants of Scripture, which sometimes overlaps, sometimes differs with the covenantal program of the Westminster Standards.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	Strong	"And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:21)
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Strong	The Christian life is the church member's life. God calls us to conform our lives to his in community.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	While the course will advocate for a baptistic ecclesiology, it will also emphasize the importance of catholicity.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both church and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading, and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Xns.	Strong	Asking potential pastors to understand the doctrine of the church is like asking a quarterback to understand the game of football. This is basic and essential for pastoring.

