



Core Seminar Systematic Theology II Session 24: Doctrine of the Church (pt. 2)

PRAYER

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, we'll be picking up where we left off last week in studying the Doctrines of the Church. For those of you who were here last week, you'll recall that we defined the church as **“the community of all true believers in Jesus Christ for all time.”** The church is made up of those people that Christ loved, died for, and saved and who are to display His glory to this world.

We also examined the nature and attributes of the church, and today we are going to look at the nuts and bolts of the visible church. We want to know what God's Word says about ordering our lives together in the context of a local church.

Author and theologian David Wells reported in his 1994 book *God in the Wasteland* that “[Seminary] students are dissatisfied with the current status of the church. They believe it has lost its vision, and they want more from it than it is giving them.” But dissatisfaction is not enough, as Wells himself agreed. We need something more. We need positively to recover what the church is to be. What is the church in her nature and essence? What is to distinguish and mark the church? If you look at your handout you will see first that we are going to look at are the marks of the church.

II. THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

While Scripture discusses the definition of a church generally, it also discusses the marks of a church a lot. These marks to help us to “be better at being the church,” and to help us tell the difference between a true church and a false one. [NOTE: Not 9 Marks]

Paul taught that the pagan temples in Corinth were making their sacrifices to demons and not to God (I Cor. 10:20). Also, Scripture speaks in Revelation of Jewish religious assemblies that were really “synagogues of Satan” (Rev. 2:9).

In other words, there is scriptural evidence for false churches, or groups that claim the name of God or the title of church, but are not filled with believers and do not preach the truth and do not glorify God. These false churches will be judged rather than glorified on the last day.

We must know, brothers and sisters, that every group that says it's a true church does not necessarily meet that standard. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and some would say the Roman Catholic Church are not true churches in the biblical sense. In addition, many would say that the very liberal protestant churches that continue to exist but that do not preach the gospel are not

true churches. But on what are these claims based? How does the Bible describe true churches and false churches?

Since the Reformation, Christian theologians have largely settled on two distinguishing marks of a Christian church. Those marks are [1] the right preaching of the Word and [2] the right administration of the sacraments (the sacraments include baptism, the Lord's Supper, and, indirectly, church discipline). Again, the two marks of a biblical church are the **right preaching of the word** and the **right administration of the sacraments**.¹

III. RIGHT PREACHING OF THE WORD

The preaching of the Word is central to the church's life because it's the primary means by which God creates and imparts spiritual life to His people.

In the Old Testament God created the material universe by his word. He gave his law to his chosen people Israel. Moses told Israel that these weren't just idle words – these words are their very life and that by them they will live long in the Promised Land (Deut. 32:47). He spoke his words through the prophets guiding and correcting his people.

It doesn't surprise us that God's word remains central to the church in the New Testament, as well. I Corinthians 1:21 says, "**God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.**"

In Romans 10, Paul says "**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**" But he immediately follows that up with some important questions: **How can people call on the name of the Lord if they have not believed in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have not heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him without someone preaching to them?** And then Paul sums it all up – Romans 10:17 says, "**Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.**"

For Paul, the right preaching of the Word is of the utmost importance. This no doubt is the driving force of his charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3-4:

"...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus...In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...I give you this charge: Preach the Word...."

¹The Augsburg Confession, which is the Lutheran statement of faith, states that the church is defined by "the congregation of saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered" (Article 7).

John Calvin, in his Institutes of the Christian Religion writes, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."

As you can see, Calvin and Luther were largely in agreement about the basic criteria upon which we could say that a true church existed. While the state of these criteria is often difficult to determine, these are the litmus tests that the reformers used in assessing whether "we have a church," or "we don't have a church."

All this is a long way to say that the **central** and **most important** mark of a godly, pure, healthy church is the right preaching of and priority of God’s word—the **preaching** and the **priority** of God’s Word.

God clearly tells us time and time again in the Bible that we’re to be dependent on His Word, both individually and as a church. In many ways, a right handling of Scripture in the teaching and preaching ministries of a local church is a prerequisite to every other mark of health and purity in the church. It’s only by placing a primacy on teaching and hearing the Word of God that we’ll be able, as a church, to make biblical decisions about how to sustain the worship, disciplines, and ordinances of a God-glorifying church.

So, briefly, what does the “right” preaching of the Word look like?

The right preaching of the Word will always commend Jesus Christ and the gospel. This is at the heart of the message of Scripture that God sent his Son Jesus to suffer God’s wrath for man’s sin so that we may have eternal life. If we miss this, we miss the fundamental point of God’s Word. The right preaching of God’s Word exalts God himself.

The right preaching of the Word also endeavors to preach all of God’s Word, the whole counsel of God (2 Tim. 3:16). Through this God’s people will grow by his Spirit and will be more conformed to Christ. We learn more about who God is and about our fallen state and condition under God’s righteous judgment. We learn how to follow God in obedience so that we don’t sin against him (Ps. 119:11).

All in all, churches must be devoted to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching if we are to be faithful to God’s calling (1 Tim. 4:13).

Questions or Comments?

We turn now to the two ceremonies that Christ ordained for his followers, ceremonies that he commanded his church to perform: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

IV. BAPTISM

Baptism is an act of obedience in which a believer in Christ publicly confesses his faith. Scripture commands baptism, but there has often been confusion as to its *significance* – and that confusion over the *meaning* of baptism has led to unbiblical teaching about who is to be baptized and how.

Three Biblical Statements About Baptism

1. Only Believers Should Be Baptized.

It’s important to understand that Scripture indicates very clearly that a conscious profession of faith in Christ *always* precedes baptism. Baptism is to be an outward sign that a person is beginning the Christian life in obedience to Christ.

Consider just a few examples:

Acts 2:41 – “*Those who accepted [the] message* were baptized.”

Acts 8:12 – “*When they believed* Philip as he preached the good news...they were baptized”

And notice that it is *after* Philip has told the Ethiopian eunuch the message of Scripture, particularly “the good news about Jesus” that the Ethiopian requests baptism, saying in Acts 8:36, “**Look here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?**”

In these passages and all others like them, those being baptized give an outward indication of faith in Christ before baptism. In the New Testament, only those who personally profess faith in Christ are baptized. This truth on its face precludes infants from being baptized since infants are incapable of making a public profession of faith in Christ.

The controversy over who should be baptized involves a larger difference over the meaning of baptism and the nature of the church. In other words, how does one become a part of the church?

Roman Catholics would argue that baptism actually regenerates and makes someone a true Christian as well as a member of the universal church. They teach that it works *ex opere operato*. This means that the physical act of baptizing itself is what conveys grace on the one baptized, regardless of the intent *or the beliefs* of the person being baptized. Clearly, this is an argument contrary to Scripture’s teaching that it’s by grace through faith in Christ that men are saved, and not by works.

Paedobaptists, those Protestants such as Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians who practice infant baptism, would argue that baptism of a child born into a believing family makes the child a member of the covenant community, and that this baptism symbolizes *probable* future regeneration but does not confer salvation as the Roman Catholics believe.

Paedobaptists will base arguments for the baptism of infants by speaking of things such as “household baptisms.” They say that the baptism of households noted in the New Testament necessarily means that children were baptized. But if we explore the relevant passages and arguments, we find that there’s no conclusive scriptural support for nonbelievers (infant or otherwise) of being baptized.

The absence of New Testament precedent for infant baptism is a fact conceded by paedobaptist theologians. The great Presbyterian theologian B.B. Warfield, for example, said, “**It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants, and no passages so stringently implying it that we must infer from them that infants were baptized.**”

The argument that paedobaptists like Warfield put forth to defend their practice is that infant baptism is a “good and necessary inference” from the silence of Scripture on the matter.

Another argument put forth by paedobaptists is that baptism in the New Testament is parallel to physical circumcision in the Old Testament. They reason that because infants were circumcised in the Old Testament as an outward sign of entrance into the covenant community, this means

that infants of believers are rightly to be baptized as an outward sign of entrance into the new covenant community. Thus, the paedobaptist asserts that the unbelieving children of a believer are “in” the new covenant.

Much could be said in opposition of this position, so realize that the following comments on this are not exhaustive:

- 1) Circumcision in the Old Testament was given to all who lived among the people of Israel, including servants (Gen. 17:10-13) and was not restricted to only those who had true inward spiritual life, such as Baptism does. In this sense, physical circumcision and baptism are not parallel. The New Testament counterpart of Old Testament physical circumcision is a spiritual circumcision, that is, a circumcision of the heart (Col. 2:11-12). Paul tells us in Romans 2:29 that real circumcision is circumcision of the heart, spiritual rather than physical. Faith was not a requirement for entrance into the old covenant, but it certainly is a requirement for entrance into the new covenant.

We see many examples in Scripture where the physical in the old covenant represented the spiritual in the new. “For example, whereas in the Old Testament the promised land was a physical, earthly type of the saints’ final rest in heaven, now all that is left is the spiritual reality of heaven itself. The temple sacrifices also were a type of the reality of Christ’s death. After Christ, we no longer perform sacrifices because the earthly type is no longer needed; now we see the spiritual reality of Christ’s sacrifice for us. I am sure you can think of other examples of this.”²

- 2) The only “covenant community” discussed in the New Testament is the church. Whereas entrance into the old covenant community was by physical birth, we find entrance into the new covenant community through spiritual birth. The means of entrance into the new covenant church is voluntary, spiritual, and internal. Jeremiah 31 tells us that the new covenant community will be those who have God’s law written on their hearts. A person becomes a member of the new covenant body of believers by being born again and by having saving faith, not by physical birth. Families may pass through the narrow gate, but they must do so in single file.³

One writer astutely notes that to say that all physical infants of believers are “in” the New Covenant as the infants of Abraham were “in” the covenants of the Old Testament violates the doctrine of particular redemption. If Christ’s sacrifice is offered up only for His elect people as what our Lord called the “New Covenant in My blood,” how can the unregenerate children of believers be said to be “in” the New Covenant?⁴

In the New Testament church the only question that matters is whether one has saving faith and has been spiritually incorporated into the body of Christ, the true church. Thus, we understand the Bible to teach that baptism is appropriately administered **only** to those who make a

² Greg Gilbert, *The Messenger*, April 2002, p. 7.

³ P. Jewett, “Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace”, p. 226.

⁴ See Fred Malone, “A String of Pearls Unstrung: A Theological Journey into Believers’ Baptism” (Founders Press).

believable profession of faith in Jesus Christ. “Baptism is not something to which a person is brought, but to which he comes.”⁵

2. Believers should be baptized by immersion.

In every clear example of baptism the Bible gives us, the method, or “mode”, of baptizing is the same. Believers are baptized by **immersion**. The Greek word *baptizo* (used in most relevant passages) usually means “to plunge, dip, or immerse something under water.”

So for example, Mark 1:5 says, “**The people of Jerusalem went out to [John]. Confessing their sins, they were baptized in the river Jordan.**” John’s gospel also tells us that John the Baptist was baptizing people at Aenon – why? – because **there “was plenty of water there.”** The need for “plenty of water” would not be an issue if these people were being sprinkled. (John 3:23)

Mark 1 also indicates that after Jesus was baptized, “**He came up out of the water.**” Or consider again the story of the Ethiopian official in Acts 8.

“As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away.”

Two observations here: 1) We’re told that the Ethiopian was on his way home from Jerusalem. Now surely if he was traveling from Judea to Africa he would have had water with him in his chariot. Certainly enough water to baptize by sprinkling would have been readily available. 2) There would have been no need for them to get out of the chariot and go “down into the water” if all Philip was going to do was take a handful of water and place it on his head.

Beyond such contextual indications, the symbolism of union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection seems to require baptism by immersion. Consider Paul’s words in Romans 6:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead...we too may walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:3-4) Note that baptism by sprinkling does not supply the picture of resurrection that the Apostle expects from baptism. Baptism by immersion gives us a richer symbolism than just washing sins away. It describes going into the waters of judgment for our sin and being saved through Christ’s death and resurrection (1 Peter 3:21).

Thus, both contextual clues and apostolic statements on the symbolism of baptism lead us to conclude that baptism by immersion is the form that most fully preserves and accomplishes the meaning of baptism.

3. Baptism is not *necessary* for salvation, but is a symbolic act of obedience that expresses one’s faith in and submission to Christ.

⁵ P. Jewett, “Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace”, p. 63.

Baptism is not required for salvation, but it's an essential part of obedience to Christ, since He commanded all those who believe to be baptized.⁶

If you think back to our discussion of the doctrines of salvation, you'll remember that regeneration precedes faith. Baptism is commanded for those who have come to faith. When I'm regenerated and converted, I'm immediately justified before God. Justification is a permanent event. Since baptism *follows* this instantaneous and permanent process of sins being forgiven and coming to new spiritual life through faith in Christ, we cannot logically say that baptism is required for salvation.

That said, it's also clear from scripture that baptism is necessary for obedience to Christ. It follows a profession of faith throughout Acts, and both Peter and Paul (I Peter 3 & Romans 6) assume that wherever possible, all the Christians in the various churches will have been baptized.

Baptism then, is simply a public testimony of God's work in us by the Holy Spirit and an act of obedience to Christ. It's a visible way for us to identify ourselves as followers of Christ, making clear our allegiance to Jesus and to His commandments. Because baptism is a clear and outward sign of obedience and **refusal** of baptism is clear and outward disobedience, baptism is a prerequisite for membership in a biblically sound church.

Questions or Comments?

V. THE LORD'S SUPPER (COMMUNION)

While Baptism is an ordinance to be observed **once** as a Christian's public expression of faith in Christ at the beginning of his Christian life, Christians are to observe communion regularly, in continuing fellowship with Christ.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper the night before he went to the cross. Matthew 26:26-29 says,

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.’”

In addition, Jesus calls his followers to “do this in remembrance of me” showing that it was intended to be done after Jesus' death and resurrection, and we see Christians, such as the church in Corinth, doing this very thing (1 Cor. 11).

What is the Meaning of the Lord's Supper?

⁶ In Acts 2:38 Peter says, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you...for the forgiveness of your sins.” To say baptism causes salvation goes against the rest of Scripture and the emphasis on faith. It rather is depicted as going alongside the new life in Christ in obedience to Jesus' command in Matthew 28.

So what are we to think of the Lord's Supper? What does communion signify? Well, there are several things symbolized in the Lord's Supper:

1. **Christ's Death** – When we participate in communion we symbolize the death of Christ because our actions give a picture of His death for us. The broken bread symbolizes Christ's broken body, and the cup symbolizes the pouring out of Christ's blood. (I Cor. 11:26)
2. **The Believers Participation in the Crucified Christ** – Jesus commanded all of His disciples to “take [and] eat.” When we individually reach out and take the bread or the cup for ourselves, we give a symbol that we participate and share in the benefits found in Christ's redemption.
3. **Spiritual Nourishment** – Just as ordinary food nourishes our physical bodies, so the elements of communion symbolize the nourishment and refreshment that Christ is giving to our souls. (John 6:53-57)
4. **The Unity of Believers** – When Christians participate in the Lord's Supper together, they give a clear sign of their unity with one another.

How is Christ Present in the Lord's Supper?

When speaking of the Lord's Supper, there have been different views about Christ's relation to His Supper. The words “This is my body” are perhaps the four most disputed words in the Bible. It all depends on what the meaning of the word “is” is. “Is” can indicate identity, attribute, cause, resemblance, or fulfillment.⁷

With respect to Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper the debate is between those who argue that “is” means identity and those who assert that “is” means resemblance. Before we consider the three main views, let me just give a quick contrast how the word “is” used in identity and symbolic resemblance:

Identity: This “is” my hand.

Symbolic Resemblance: James 3:6, “The tongue ‘is’ a fire.”

Now that we are thoroughly prepared from that short English lesson, let us consider the different views put forth for the elements in the Lord's Supper:

- **Transubstantiation** – Roman Catholics teach this view, which asserts that the bread and wine *actually become* in their essence the body and blood of Christ. At the moment in the mass when the priest says, “this is my body,” the bread becomes the literal, physical body of Christ. For them, ‘is’ connotes identity, and so they understand the Lord's Supper to be a physical re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 6:6).
- **Consubstantiation** – Luther put forward this view and many Lutherans still adhere to it. They teach that although the bread and wine do not actually become the literal body and

⁷ Taken from D.A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies.

blood, the physical body of Christ is literally present “in, with and under” the physical bread and wine. The analogy here is kind of like water in a sponge, the idea being that Christ’s body is somehow “contained” in the elements. This view arose from Luther’s perception of a requirement to take the “this is my body” statement, in some sense, literally.

- **Spiritual Presence, Symbolism** – These are the views held by the rest of Protestant churches, as well as this local church. The bread and wine *symbolize* the body and blood of Christ. They *give a visible sign of the fact of His true, though spiritual, presence*. It’s a visible sermon where those who are believers feed on Christ by faith. John Calvin says,

“... Unless a man means to call God a deceiver he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by him...And the godly ought by all means to keep this rule: whenever they see symbols appointed by the Lord, to think and be persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is surely present there. For why would the Lord put in your hand the symbol of his body, except to assure you of a true participation in it? But we must establish such a presence of Christ in the Supper as may neither fasten him to the element of bread, nor enclose him in bread, nor [limit] him in any way (all which things, it is clear, detract from his heavenly glory).”

Who Should Participate in the Lord’s Supper?

There are three requirements for receiving the Lord’s Supper appropriately:

1. One must be a believer in Christ (1 Cor. 11:29-30). We are in participation with our Savior.
2. One must have been baptized (Baptism is clearly a symbol of beginning the Christian life and entrance into the church, while the Lord’s Supper is clearly a symbol of continuing the Christian life in the context of the church.)
3. One must come in a spirit of self-examination, and must be in fellowship with the others of the body in a way that reflects Christ’s character. We are not to eat and drink in an unworthy manner being careless of our sin (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

Questions or Comments?

VI. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

It has often been assumed that the Lord’s Supper necessarily entails church discipline, which is our fourth qualification of a more pure church. John 3:16 used to be the verse of the Bible that most people knew, even if relatively unchurched. Today, Matthew 7:1, “**Judge not lest ye be judged**” seems to hold that position. But as unpopular as the idea of church discipline is, Christians are called to be discerning and to protect the church from those who would remain under its banner and yet lead wicked lives.

God's people have always been called to be holy because God himself is holy (Lev. 19:1-2). Yet, we have many examples of God's people, particularly in the Old Testament, rebelling in idolatry and unrighteousness profaning the name of Yahweh. The clean and the unclean are never to be mixed. From the first sin, Adam and Even were banished from Eden and their unhindered fellowship with God was lost. Through Moses, God gave his law to Israel teaching them this very principle through discipline. Membership in God's family has many privileges, but it also has an obligation to resist sin.

So it doesn't surprise us to see discipline being commanded in New Testament churches. In chastising the church in Corinth for failing to exercise church discipline, Paul in 1 Cor. 5 writes,

“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you.’”

While formative teaching is considered church discipline and a necessary part of a church, we're specifically going to be speaking about corrective teaching.

Purposes of Church Discipline

So why practice church discipline? In our day of age, doesn't it detract from God's love rather than enhance it? Shouldn't the focus be on mercy and not judgment? Well, here are some reasons why we, as a church,⁸ should follow God's Word in practicing church discipline:

1. **For restoration and reconciliation of the Believer who is going astray** – Sin hinders fellowship with God among believers, as well as between individual believers. In the case of a confessed Christian who is unrepentant in his sin, it's commanded of the church to admonish him in the hope of bringing about repentance and restoration of fellowship (2 Cor. 2:6). If repentance doesn't happen, then love and responsibility demand that members of that person's fellowship not “ignore” gross sin in this person's life but exclude him from their fellowship.

As Christians, and certainly as church members, one of the worst things that we can do to someone is to assure them that they are saved if they do not desire to turn from their sin. While church discipline sounds harsh to our ears, it's the most loving thing to do in some circumstances. A loving God disciplines His children, and fellow Christians (members of same church) are often the vehicle He uses. Discipline is one of the ways God calls us to love each other and should be done in a loving attitude seeking the best for the person before God. See Prov. 13:24, Heb. 12:6, Gal. 6:1, 1 Cor. 5:5

2. **To keep sin from spreading to others** – Discipline of a church member in unrepentant sin may serve as a deterrent to other church members by showing the seriousness and consequences of sin. We are warned in scripture of the danger of sin and how it can spread (Heb. 12:15, 1 Cor. 5:2, 6-7, 1 Tim. 5:20). Church discipline then will work to prevent the “bad yeast” from corrupting the whole “batch of dough”.

⁸ The church was given the “keys of the kingdom” in Matthew 16:19 and the power to “bind and loose” in matters of church discipline (Matthew 18:18).

3. **To protect the purity of the church and the honor of Christ** – While no believer in this age has a completely pure heart, when a church member continues to sin in a way that’s outwardly evident to others, especially nonbelievers, the name of Christ is dishonored (Rom. 2:24). This is why Paul is shocked that the Corinthians have not disciplined the man who was continuing in willful sin that was known publicly in the church (1 Cor. 5:1-2). Paul is deeply concerned about moral “blemishes” in the church – certainly for the sakes of those committing the sins, but also for the sake of the blemishes themselves and what they say about Christ.

Questions or Comments?

VII. CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The last thing that we want to consider today is what Scripture says about who governs the church. Clearly, it’s Christ’s church, and he is her head. Yet, God does establish earthly authority in Scripture.

There are generally three forms of church government observed with some variety in how each is practiced. We’ll call these three forms Episcopalian government, Presbyterian government, and Congregational government.

Episcopalian

The Episcopalian system gives final authority to an archbishop who presides over other bishops with lesser authority who preside over various local churches in an area (i.e. diocese). The case made for such a system is that the Apostles were given authority over churches and so their successors, who are seen to be bishops, will do the same. This form of government was increasingly used in the second century and continues today.

Presbyterian

The Presbyterian system gives final authority to a group of elders (i.e. the General Assembly), which presides over other elder groups (e.g. Synod, Presbytery) with lesser authority all the way down to the elders of a local church (i.e. Session). These elders serve as representatives of the church. The case made for this system is derived from certain principles in Scripture, such as the authority given to elders (Heb. 13:17, Acts 15) and the conventional wisdom of cooperating with other churches.

Congregational

The Congregational system leaves each local church autonomous from other local churches. The authority for her affairs is left with the church as a whole. The responsibility of discipline and doctrine finally lies with the congregation.

While the Episcopalian and Presbyterian models are practiced by others, we find that Congregationalism is the most biblical form of government for local churches. In the New Testament congregations are specifically given responsibility to rule on such matters as disputes between members (Matt. 18:15-17), matters of doctrine (Gal. 1:8; II Tim. 4:3), matters of church

discipline (I Cor. 5) and matters of church membership (II Cor. 2:6-8).⁹ If we look to the letters written in the New Testament, most of them are written to churches and not church leaders. The idea that there is a priesthood of believers strongly suggests that the church is directly under Christ rather than a hierarchy of bishops.

So where does the biblical office of elders fit in to a congregational system? While we see many examples of the local church being the final court of appeals in areas of discipline and doctrine, we also see exhortations for the church to obey her leaders – the elders (Heb. 13:17). The elders are not given the final rule, but they are to lead the church by providing oversight, teaching, and prayer. Not every matter needs to be decided by the whole church. In 1 Corinthians 6 we see the church permitted to hand certain matters over to sub-groups of the congregation.

In conclusion, God deliberately set up his church to better portray his glory to a fallen world. We at Capitol Hill Baptist Church want to abide by his rule for his church as the Spirit enables us both for our good and his glory.

Questions or Comments?

PRAYER

⁹ See Mark Dever's ecclesiology chapter (not yet published at time of writing).

APPENDIX A

Other material that can be used in course:

It's inconsistent to give the covenantal sign of baptism to infants but then withhold the Lord's Supper until they make a profession of faith.¹⁰ The Passover feast, which is the equivalent of the Lord's Supper, included the entire family.¹¹ Paedobaptists reason from an inclusive circumcision to an inclusive baptism but from an inclusive Passover to an exclusive Lord's Supper.¹² One should either espouse believer's baptism or infant communion.

Why should we listen to preaching in person? Surely, in Biblical times they had to assemble together or they could not physically hear the proclamation of God's Word, but today we have advanced technology and can achieve the same thing in solitude. [Primarily, it's important to gather with the church body and be built together through the preaching of the Word. While a tape or video of preaching may be useful, it does not replace the personal benefits of hearing God's Word proclaimed in person. Instead, it is impersonal and the passion for calling souls to repent and believe is minimized. In addition, the elders are responsible for teaching God's Word because they know the flock and can draw out personal implications for the hearers in the church than some impersonal voice with no knowledge of the life of the church. It is a labor of love for a pastor to address the church he loves who are gathered together

¹⁰ P. Jewett, "Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace", p. 9.

¹¹ P. Jewett, "Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace", p. 53.

¹² P. Jewett, "Infant Baptism & the Covenant of Grace", p. 203-205.

in love. Who better to speak to a church than her leaders? On a side note, it is also more difficult to be distracted when you are gathered together with others also listening.]

Why can't we have conversations rather than preaching in a church? Many, such as Nicodemus in John 3, have learned much through dialogue. Shouldn't we abandon such antiquated methods, such as preaching, because it is often dry, unengaging and too authoritarian? Isn't there such a thing as the priesthood of believers? [Churches should definitely engage in biblical conversations with one another. Bible studies, prayer times, and time for informal conversations such as after a service are helpful and come alongside the preaching of God's Word. The problem with sub-planting preaching for conversation is that only one voice must be heard, and that is God's! His voice is primary and should fuel all other conversations. The preaching of God's Word doesn't make us dependent on anything other than God's Word and Spirit. It is good and right to preach authoritatively from Scripture instead of making suggestions because God's Word is authoritative and we need to hear it. This is how God reveals Himself to us through the Bible. If we downplay the sermon, we ultimately downplay God's Word as authoritative. There is truth that the medium is the message. Finally, while every believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit, not many should presume to be teachers (James 3:1). God has gifted his people diversely. The gospel is news to be proclaimed and not an opinion to be discussed.]

Why not use drama or other visual ascetics in place of or in addition to preaching?

[Preaching is God's appointed means, and he receives the glory through it. Preaching is simple and can be easily duplicated, it's timeless, and it's transcultural. If a church tries to supplant or crowd preaching out with these other things, then she is not trusting in God's wisdom. Besides that, there is danger for the speaker to become a technician (e.g. PowerPoint) or an actor rather than a preacher, and his hearers may be more interested in the presentation than the words.]

Why is transubstantiation wrong? [To say that the bread and wine actually become Jesus' body and blood is to partake in a form of idolatry by worshipping that which was created. It is also seen as a re-sacrificing of Christ where it is an offering made to God to obtain forgiveness of sin showing that Christ's atonement was insufficient. Christ encounters his people "not by bodily presence in the elements, but by the Spirit's presence and power in their hearts."¹³ When the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ, he couldn't be saying that He held his body and blood in his hands to the disciples. Scripture even refers to the bread as bread after it is supposedly suppose to be transubstantiated (1 Cor. 11:26)]

What is the difference between what Catholics and Protestants mean when they refer to "means of grace"? ["Catholics view these as "means of salvation" that make people more fit to receive justification from God. But on a Protestant view, the means of grace are simply means of additional blessing within the Christian life, and do not add to our fitness to receive justification from God."¹⁴]

¹³ T. Dowley (Ed.), "Introduction to The History of Christianity", p. 374.

¹⁴ W. Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 952.

If the local church wants to have a membership as close as possible to the universal church, then why do some Baptist churches exclude Christians who differ on their view of baptism? Shouldn't we be more accommodating to other Christians who may not be able to find a good church to join? [Primarily, it would be hard to allow someone join a church who is in active disobedience to Christ's command for believers to be baptized. They would have to be immediately disciplined. If a church did allow such a member to join for the sake of unity, then their teaching to follow Christ's commands are severely undermined, even if the church (and leadership) continues to teach only believers baptism.]

Can Christians who aren't members of the same church take communion together? [In one sense this is a question of open or closed (i.e. for church members only) communion. CHBC fences the Lord's Table by also allowing other baptized Christians who are members in another evangelical church to participate. We do this to recognize the unity of the larger body of Christ and don't differentiate on the issue of how another church practices baptism. In another sense, communion is to be practiced corporately (not individually) and administered by the church only (not a parachurch gathering). It represents our corporate unity in the body of Christ and was a practice of the early church (1 Cor. 11) that was instituted by Christ.]

For the Right Preaching of God's Word Section

Well, the belief of most reformed, evangelical pastors, our own among them, has been that the best way to consistently teach the full message of God's Word is through the method of "expositional preaching." Expositional preaching may be an unfamiliar term to some. Very simply it may be defined as "the explanation and application of a specific portion of Scripture, taken in context, using the point of the passage as the point of the message." It's taking a passage in its original context, and taking the point that the original Biblical author was making as the point of the sermon. That defines preaching as "expositional."

Here at CHBC, you may occasionally hear what could be called *doctrinal preaching*. Michael Lawrence's series of sermons on the Covenants are an example of this type of preaching. Doctrinal instruction in sermonic form can be extremely useful in teaching us biblical truths and doctrines that should form the life of the Christian. Doctrinal preaching "need not oppose expository preaching, for it can rest on solid interpretation and can supplement such preaching."¹⁵

However, of the two types of preaching mentioned, there are some good reasons for making expository preaching the norm. I'll give you two. First, continuous preaching through texts "forces pastors to address the whole counsel of God, [and] not merely what interests them."¹⁶ Approaching the message of Scripture *as Scripture lays it out*, in context, is the best way to ensure that we learn what the Lord has for us in all of His Word. A pastor and his congregation should continually have their minds renewed and transformed by Scripture, and expository

¹⁵ Dan Doriani, "Doctrinal Preaching in Historical Perspective," TRINJ 23NS (2002) 35-52, 36.

¹⁶ Id. at 35.

preaching helps to ensure that. After all, we're not finally concerned what the preacher has to say, but of what God says in his Word.

Second, "sensitive topics can be addressed naturally, as they appear in sequence in the text, so there is no appearance of picking topics or picking on listeners."¹⁷ I would just add that good expository preaching should incorporate elements of doctrinal preaching – key doctrines should be emphasized when they're the focus of a particular text. In any case, Scripture must be the focus of the sermon and those listening must be shown their responsibility to respond to the preaching of God's Word.

¹⁷ Id.