

## **The Church: It's Nature, It's Marks, and It's Purposes (Part 2)**

1. The Church and the Kingdom - see Grudem, 863-864
  - 1.1. The kingdom of God is rule of God, and therefore the sphere of His rule. Ultimately, in God's Kingdom His will is done. Originally, this would have included the entire creation. All of life was worship, everything was holy, and the entire creation was God's Heavenly Kingdom.
  - 1.2. After the fall, however, God instituted a distinction between two parts of His Kingdom. On the one hand, He instituted a common kingdom (sometimes called the kingdom of man), which is the realm of common grace ruled through general revelation. On the other hand, He instituted the redemptive kingdom (sometimes called the kingdom of God), which is the realm of saving grace ruled through special revelation. To avoid confusion, I will use the kingdom of God to include both the redemptive and common kingdoms, and will refer to the distinct aspects of that kingdom by the names redemptive and common kingdom.
    - 1.2.1. The common kingdom is necessary for human beings to continue to exist and even flourish in spite of sin. This aspect of God's kingdom restrains sin and promotes proper conduct, even among unbelievers. Without this Kingdom, sin would destroy all human beings, and there would be no flourishing or culture. This is particularly the sphere of civil institutions such as the government. All humans - including Christians - are part of this kingdom, simply by virtue of their humanity.
    - 1.2.2. The redemptive kingdom is necessary to bear witness to the eternal kingdom of God. It is not of this age or of this world, but comes from a different "time" (eternity) and different "place" (heaven). Without this Kingdom there would be no testimony of the Gospel, and all humans would perish eternally. No human is naturally part of this aspect of God's Kingdom - in fact we can not even see it until we have been reborn by the Spirit of God (see John 3:1-9). Thus, only Christians, and the angels who did not fall, are part of this Kingdom (though in the future it will also include the New Heavens and the New Earth - the restored creation.)
    - 1.2.3. For a much more in depth look at this topic, refer to the teaching series "Christ, the Church, Christians, and Culture" which is available at <http://www.bayridgechristianchurch.org/page12/page32/files/category-christ002c-the-church002c-christians002c-and-culture.html>
  - 1.3. In one sense, therefore, the Kingdom of God is much broader than the Church, for God's rule certainly extends beyond the borders of His Church.

- 1.3.1. Although from one perspective everything is under the rule and reign of god, from another perspective, the kingdom of darkness, even though it is ultimately under the Sovereignty of God, is still not part of His kingdom. It is the place of the dominion of Satan and darkness, and is contrasted with the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom, which is in heaven and is coming, is contrasted with the kingdom of Satan, which is on this earth and is passing away.
- 1.3.1.1. Colossians 1:13 For he has rescued us from **the dominion of darkness** and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.
- 1.3.1.2. Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against **the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world** and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
- 1.3.1.3. John 18:36 Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now **my kingdom is from another place.**"
- 1.3.1.4. Matthew 6:9–10 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our **Father in heaven**, hallowed be your name, <sup>10</sup> **your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**"
- 1.3.2. This kingdom of darkness is associated with this age and this world, while the Kingdom of God is the Age to come and the world to come which is breaking in on this age and world and breaking its power even now.
- 1.3.2.1. John 18:36 Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. **But now my kingdom is from another place.**"
- 1.3.2.2. 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> **The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ**, who is the image of God.
- 1.3.2.3. John 12:31–32 "**Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.** <sup>32</sup> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."
- 1.3.2.4. John 16:7–11 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> **When he comes, he will convict the world** of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> and **in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.**

- 1.3.2.5. Acts 26:17–18 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. **I am sending you to them<sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God,** so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’
- 1.3.2.6. Revelation 11:15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: **“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”**
- 1.3.3. Wherever we see sin being restrained and righteousness being exalted we in some sense are seeing the Kingdom of God - even if the work is not redemptive in purpose or scope. Thus, when government restrains evil conduct and promotes good conduct, which is what civil government is supposed to do (and generally does do), it is in some sense extending the Kingdom of God - even if the regime in question is not promoting Christianity in any way. This is why those serving in civil government - even when they are not Christians - are called servants of God.
- 1.3.3.1. Romans 13:1–4 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for **there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.**<sup>2</sup> Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.<sup>3</sup> **For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.** Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.<sup>4</sup> **For he is God’s servant to do you good.** But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. **He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.**
- 1.3.3.2. 1 Peter 2:13–14 Submit yourselves **for the Lord’s sake** to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,<sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are **sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.**
- 1.4. This means that the Church is not identical to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is broader than the Church. God’s rule extends beyond the borders of His Church, and we must not confuse the Church with the Kingdom. To do this will inevitably lead to the Church attempting to exert direct power in areas where God has not called her to exert direct power. It is not the business of the Church to try and rule the other parts of God’s Kingdom. The Church is the instrument of the redemptive kingdom, and it is here to promote the redemptive kingdom. On the other hand, the church is NOT here to DIRECTLY rule or manipulate the common kingdom. When the Church does this, she is confusing herself with the kingdom, and thereby undermining her true role, purpose and work.

- 1.4.1. 1 Corinthians 5:12–13 **What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?** <sup>13</sup> **God will judge those outside.** “Expel the wicked man from among you.”
- 1.4.2. Luke 12:13–14 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup> **Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”**
- 1.4.2.1. This verse sounds strange at first. Does not Jesus, the Lord of the Universe, have the right to make such a decision? But the question here is one of proper jurisdiction. In His role as Messiah, Jesus was not coming to determine civil issues, but rather to provide for the redemptive kingdom. Consequently, He refuses to become entangled in such affairs.
- 1.4.3. Note that this is why we do not read anything about the Church trying to influence the politics of the Roman Empire, or the Church trying to use temporal power to achieve its ends. To do this would be a confusion of the Church and the Kingdom. The Church’s influence over the civil kingdom (which became vast over the centuries) was initially (and correctly) through indirect rather than direct means.
- 1.5. However, this does not mean that the Church is unrelated to the Kingdom of God, or hermetically sealed off from the rest of the Kingdom of God. On the contrary, the Church is part of God’s Kingdom, and is intimately related to God’s Kingdom. One day God’s Kingdom will be manifest everywhere, and His will is going to be accomplished everywhere as it is in heaven now. In the meantime, the Church bears witness to this fact, proclaiming the rule of God and the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Church does not attempt to bring the Kingdom by force, but rather through the preaching of the Gospel of peace.
- 1.5.1. Acts 26:17–18 **I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them** <sup>18</sup> **to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God,** so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’
- 1.5.2. Ephesians 6:12 **For our struggle is not against flesh and blood,** but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against **the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**
- 1.5.3. 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 **For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.** <sup>4</sup> **The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.** On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> **We demolish arguments and every pretension** that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

- 1.6. This also does not mean that Christians are not involved in the work of the common kingdom. They most certainly must be. Yet, they do this as citizens of the common kingdom. Being a Christian does not remove one from the common kingdom. Thus, in our nation, Christians should vote, lobby their officials, hold regular jobs, and even serve in government (if that is their individual vocation/calling.)
- 1.7. However, when serving in the common kingdom, individual Christians must not confuse the redemptive kingdom with the common kingdom. This has VERY important implications as can be seen in the following examples:
  - 1.7.1. Exodus 20:2–3 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.”
    - 1.7.1.1. Christians MUST enforce this within the redemptive kingdom. In the Church we do not allow any other gods. If anyone worships other gods, they must be approached, and if they refuse to repent, they must be disciplined and ultimately excommunicated. They must be “driven from the land” and “expelled from among” us.
    - 1.7.1.2. However, Christians should NOT try to enforce this in the common kingdom. In this age God allows unbelievers to not worship or to worship false gods. We must not try to get the civil authority to prohibit this. To attempt to do this is a confusion of the kingdoms and of our time within redemptive history. This was appropriate for Israel in the promised land under the Mosaic covenant - it is totally inappropriate for us, for we are exiles and aliens (see 1 Peter 1:1-12) living under the new covenant.
    - 1.7.1.3. Furthermore, would we really want unbelievers determining true and false belief and worship and then attempting to enforce this?
  - 1.7.2. Exodus 20:17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”
    - 1.7.2.1. Christians must fight against coveting, knowing that sin begins in the heart. And we must urge one another to not give in to this sin.
    - 1.7.2.2. However, would we really want the government attempting to discern coveting and to punish it? Would we really want laws that tried to do this? And would we want unbelievers attempting to enforce such laws?
- 1.8. Finally, the Church as the Church can even labor beside and with unbelievers to accomplish good in the common kingdom. The Church can give to the poor, and support civic good works. However, these must never include an attempt to coerce unbelievers into behaving as believers must behave, nor must these things ever encroach upon the church’s true mission. They serve as a means to the end of the Church’s testimony to the salvation offered in Christ. Consequently, in general, it is better if individual Christians work with the common kingdom, and the Church restrict her roles to the issues listed in the sections on the marks and purposes of the Church.

2. The importance of balance
  - 2.1. To properly understand the nature of the Church, we must hold all of these items we have discussed in parts 1 and also in relation to the Church and the Kingdom in their proper Scriptural balance and relationship. We must not stress the invisible Church and ignore the visible Church. We must not stress the Universal Church while downplaying or ignoring the local church. On the other hand, we must not so stress the visible, local church that we end up denying the unity of the Universal, invisible Church and become schismatics. We must let all of the metaphors speak for themselves, understand the Church throughout redemptive history, and note both the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom, but also maintain a distinction between the two.
  - 2.2. In short, we need a good systematic ecclesiology!

### **The Marks of the Church**

1. The Romans Catholic and Eastern Orthodox view
  - 1.1. Both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches believe that the marks of the church are found within the succession of bishops. They state that the true church is found wherever the bishops can trace their ordinations back to the apostles.
  - 1.2. We discussed this in the previous discussion on this chapter. For notes on why the doctrine of “apostolic succession” as defined and practiced by Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy is biblically incorrect and insufficient, see section 2.1.5 of the notes on Part 1 of the discussion on this chapter.
2. The Need to Test and Determine the True Church
  - 2.1. If one can not simply look at an external organization, how can we determine which churches are part of the true Church?
  - 2.2. The Reformers noted that in Scripture some groups claiming to know God were deemed to be false. This means that claims to be the true people of God must be judged objectively. Consequently, Scripture encourages God’s people to test teachers, leaders, and even apostles to determine if they are real or false.
    - 2.2.1. Revelation 2:9 I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich! I know the slander of **those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**
    - 2.2.2. Revelation 3:9 I will make **those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars** — I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.
    - 2.2.3. 1 John 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**
    - 2.2.4. Revelation 2:2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that **you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.**

- 2.2.5. 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21 Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; <sup>20</sup> do not treat prophecies with contempt. <sup>21</sup> Test everything. Hold on to the good.
3. The Reformers View - the Three Marks of the Church
- 3.1. The Reformers identified marks of a true church: identifiers by which one could discern if a group claiming to be the church was making a valid claim.
- 3.1.1. The Augsburg Confession (Lutheran - 1530), defined the church as “the congregation of saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered” (Article 7).
- 3.1.2. “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.” (John Calvin, Institutes 4.1.9)
- 3.1.3. Although neither Calvin nor Luther directly mention it, a third mark of church discipline was added by later Reformed confessions and teachers.
- 3.1.3.1. In a sense, this third mark (discipline) is inherent in the other two, since if the Word is rightly preached it will expose and rebuke sin, and if the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is rightly administered, it will be withheld from those in blatant, unrepentant and public sin.
- 3.1.4. Another way of looking at the marks of a true church is that they are vital signs of a healthy church. Since no church is perfect, these three areas are key signs that tell us the health of a church. If they totally lack one or more of these, they are probably unhealthy, if not totally apostate. However, if they are growing in all three of these areas, the church is probably healthy and flourishing.
- 3.1.4.1. This way of looking at this topic also prevents one from viewing the “marks” in a binary fashion - one either has them or they do not. Instead, it is recognized that each church is more or less correct in their doctrine and practice of each of these areas, and the church will correspondingly experience greater or lesser health as a result.
- 3.2. The three marks of the church (or vital signs of a healthy church)
- 3.2.1. The right preaching of the Word
- 3.2.1.1. Jesus Himself indicated that the teaching of Scripture is a primary call for His church, and the early Church was committed to the teaching of the Scriptures.
- 3.2.1.1.1. Matthew 28:19–20 Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
- 3.2.1.1.2. John 8:31–32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “**If you hold to my teaching, you are really my**

- disciples.** <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- 3.2.1.1.3. Acts 2:42 **They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching** and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- 3.2.1.2. This mark is taught in a number of Scriptures where we are commanded to test teachings to determine if they are true or false, and even to stop false teachers from teaching error.
- 3.2.1.2.1. Deuteronomy 18:18–20 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. <sup>19</sup> If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. <sup>20</sup> **But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.”**
- 3.2.1.2.2. Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more **noble character** than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.**
- 3.2.1.2.3. Romans 16:17–18 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are **contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.** <sup>18</sup> **For such people are not serving our Lord Christ,** but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.
- 3.2.1.3. This is not referring to disagreements over small disputable doctrines, but rather central, essential items such as the Gospel, the Deity and humanity of Christ, and the resurrection of the body.
- 3.2.1.3.1. Galatians 1:8–9 **But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!** <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a **gospel** other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!
- 3.2.1.3.2. 1 John 4:1–3 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: **Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,** <sup>3</sup> **but every spirit that**



does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

3.2.1.3.3. 1 Corinthians 15:1–5 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

3.2.1.4. This means that if a group is wrong on a major doctrine - and especially on the Gospel, they are not a real church. No matter what they claim, if they have lost the Gospel or other essential doctrines of the faith, they have either ceased to be a true church, or they never were one in the first place.

3.2.1.4.1. The early creeds of the church are very helpful in this regard. Although the creeds are not Scripture, and must never be treated as if they are, they are an excellent summary of most essential doctrines, and they have been accepted by Christians and churches as such at all times and places. If a group will not subscribe to the doctrines taught in the early creeds, they are most likely a cult rather than a true church.

3.2.1.5. This also means that the teaching ministry of a church should major on the things the Scripture majors on, rather than small, disputable matters. If a church majors on minors or simply ignores essential Christian doctrine, this vital sign is not doing well.

3.2.1.6. However, some people are so zealous to find a church with no error, that they fall to the opposite extreme and relish arguing over every little doctrine. Paul warned us about such people, and counseled having nothing to do with them.

3.2.1.6.1. Titus 3:10–11 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. <sup>10</sup> Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. <sup>11</sup> You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

3.2.1.6.2. 2 Timothy 2:23–26 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they

produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

3.2.1.6.3. 1 Timothy 6:3–5 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, <sup>4</sup> he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions <sup>5</sup> and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

### 3.2.2. The proper administration of the sacraments

3.2.2.1. This mark refers to the proper use of the two sacraments: water baptism and the Lord's Supper.

3.2.2.1.1. We will cover the sacraments, and why we believe there are only two, in a later session.

3.2.2.2. Jesus Himself indicated the importance of water baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the early Church was committed to both.

3.2.2.2.1. Matthew 28:19–20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

3.2.2.2.2. Matthew 26:26–29 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.” <sup>27</sup> Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup> This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> 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.”

3.2.2.2.3. Acts 2:41–42 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. <sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the

apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- 3.2.2.3. These Sacraments are part of the church accepting new members and disciplining those whose professions of faith are contradicted by continual, unrepentant, public sin.
  - 3.2.2.3.1. Upon profession of faith new members are admitted to the fellowship of the church through water baptism.
    - 3.2.2.3.1.1. Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.
    - 3.2.2.3.1.2. Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
    - 3.2.2.3.1.3. Acts 16:33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.
  - 3.2.2.3.2. Those who are members in the church continue to profess their faith publicly as they receive the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, those who sin brazenly, boldly, publicly, and unrepentantly are to be excluded from communion (ex-communicated.)
- 3.2.2.4. The idea of "proper administration" can cause real problems. For example, how do we handle groups who differ on the proper subjects of water baptism (believers and their children vs. believers only) or the proper mode of water baptism (sprinkling vs immersion)? What about those who differ on the nature of the Lord's Supper (transubstantiation vs. consubstantiation vs. spiritual presence vs. memorial)?
  - 3.2.2.4.1. Some believe that anyone who differs with them on such questions are not a real church. They view organizations holding other beliefs and practices on these questions to be guilty of not properly administering the Sacraments and of therefore not being a true church. They may say such people are believers, but their gathering is not a church but rather a "sect" of some sort.
  - 3.2.2.4.2. I would say that questions such as these do not determine if a group is a true church or not. Such questions do not arise to the level of essential doctrine,

and Christians of good heart and mind can disagree. Again, if we view these as vital signs of a healthy church, we realize that it is not an “either-or” proposition. Just because a group does not hold the same beliefs and practices on water baptism or the Lord’s Supper does not mean there is no validity in their belief or practice, or that they are not a “real” church.

### 3.2.3. Church discipline

3.2.3.1. Jesus Himself indicated that the church would practice church discipline, and the early Church was committed to disciplining members whose doctrines or lifestyle were deemed utterly incompatible with the faith.

3.2.3.1.1. Matthew 18:15–17 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.<sup>16</sup> But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’<sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

3.2.3.1.2. 1 Corinthians 5:9–13 I have written you in my letter **not to associate with sexually immoral people** —<sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing you that **you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.**<sup>12</sup> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?<sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. **“Expel the wicked man from among you.”**

3.2.3.1.3. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to **keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.**

3.2.3.1.4. 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 **If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him,** in order that he may feel

ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

3.2.3.2. From these (and other) Scriptures, there are several things we should note about church discipline.

3.2.3.2.1. It appears that there are two reasons that someone might be placed under church discipline and eventually excommunicated if they do not repent. First, those who believe or teach heresy (not simple error, but very serious error on foundational issues as noted above) must be disciplined. Second, those whose lives deny the truth of the Gospel and are unrepentant for their continual, bold sin must be disciplined.

3.2.3.2.1.1. Romans 16:17–18 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are **contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.** <sup>18</sup> For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By **smooth talk and flattery they deceive** the minds of naive people.

3.2.3.2.1.2. Titus 3:10–11 But avoid **foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law**, because these are unprofitable and useless. <sup>10</sup> **Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.** <sup>11</sup> You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

3.2.3.2.1.3. 2 Timothy 2:23–26 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> **Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,** <sup>26</sup> **and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.**

3.2.3.2.1.4. Deuteronomy 13:1–5 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, <sup>2</sup> and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, “Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let us worship them,” <sup>3</sup> you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup> It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. <sup>5</sup> That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.

3.2.3.2.1.4.1. Note that the NT equivalent of death is expulsion from the assembly of God’s people. See 1 Corinthians 5:13, which is quoting from this verse (and Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 22:21; etc.) and equating purging the evil by putting to death with purging the evil but excommunicating them from the church.

3.2.3.2.1.5. 1 Corinthians 5:9–13 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — <sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and

swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. <sup>11</sup> But now I am writing you that **you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.** <sup>12</sup> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. **“Expel the wicked man from among you.”**

3.2.3.2.1.6. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to **keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.**

3.2.3.2.1.7. 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 **If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him,** in order that he may feel ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

3.2.3.2.2. Church discipline is not for any sin, but for brazen, continual, unrepentant sin, such as the man in Corinth who was publicly known to be having sex with his step-mother, and took pride in this fact. Paul counseled that for such public, brazen, unrepentant sin he must be handed over to Satan.

3.2.3.2.2.1. 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 It is actually reported that there is **sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife.** <sup>2</sup> **And you are proud!** Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have **put out of your fellowship the man who did this?** <sup>3</sup> Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of our Lord

Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, <sup>5</sup> **hand this man over to Satan**, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

3.2.3.2.3. Church discipline is a process undertaken by the whole church, not a single individual. And it is not done immediately, but only after people have refused to repent when confronted regarding their sin or false teaching.

3.2.3.2.3.1. Matthew 18:15–17 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, **just between the two of you**. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup> But if he will not listen, **take one or two others along**, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

3.2.3.2.3.2. Titus 3:10–11 **Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.** <sup>11</sup> You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

3.2.3.2.4. The goal of church discipline is causing the person to awaken to their error and sin, and to repent and be restored to fellowship.

3.2.3.2.4.1. 1 Corinthians 5:5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

3.2.3.2.4.2. 1 Timothy 1:18–20 Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, <sup>19</sup> holding on to faith and a good conscience. **Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.** <sup>20</sup> **Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed**



over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

3.2.3.2.4.3. 2 Timothy 2:24–26 And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

3.3. The reality of more and less pure churches

- 3.3.1. As noted above, no church is absolutely pure in its teachings, administration of the Sacraments, and church discipline. All true churches are doing these things to one degree or another, and no church is doing them perfectly.
- 3.3.2. This means that the standard is not pure versus impure churches, but more pure versus less pure churches. The scale is analog rather than binary.
- 3.3.3. This means that if a person seeks a perfectly pure church, they will never find it. Such individuals will constantly disobey Christ’s directive for their involvement in a local church.
- 3.3.4. If a church does not strive for adherence to and growth in these areas, it will become apostate. However, if a church strives for total purity in an unrealistic manner, it will become judgmental, full of backbiting, and self-destructive.

## The Purposes of the Church

### 1. Ministry to God - Worship (Vertical)

1.1. The church is called to worship God. In fact, the chief goal and purpose of life is to glorify God. It is in this that we will find our true fulfillment. This means that the church does not primarily exist for the needs of its members or to reach out to unbelievers, but to glorify and worship God. Worship is the foundation for the other purposes of the church. If a church is weak in its worship, it will be weak in its discipleship and outreach as well. On the other hand, true worship will fuel passionate and effective discipleship and outreach. Therefore it is critical that we develop a vital life of worship as individuals and as a community of believers.

1.1.1. 1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1.1.2. Psalm 95:1-7 Come, **let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.** <sup>2</sup> **Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.** <sup>3</sup> For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. <sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. <sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the

dry land. <sup>6</sup> Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; <sup>7</sup> for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

- 1.1.3. Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and **as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.**
- 1.1.4. Revelation 15:3b-4 Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. <sup>4</sup> **Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.**
- 1.2. Worship includes both the corporate act of the church offering confession, thanksgiving, praise, and prayer to God, and also each member living a life that is in accord with God's covenant commands.
- 1.3. Corporate worship includes every aspect of our corporate gatherings - song, prayer, fellowship (see below on discipleship), teaching, and the Sacraments. All of these are part of biblical worship.
- 1.4. For a discussion of the biblical basis of the various parts of our meeting, see "Our Pattern of Worship" available on the church website.

## 2. Ministry to the Church - Discipleship (Internal)

- 2.1. The church is also called to disciple its members. The Great Commission does not merely call for us to preach the Gospel – it also calls us to make disciples of everyone who comes to faith. The early church did not just make converts - they trained disciples.
  - 2.1.1. Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
  - 2.1.2. 2 Timothy 2:1–2 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> And **the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.**
  - 2.1.3. Acts 14:21–22 They preached the good news in that city and **won a large number of disciples.** Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup> **strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.**  
“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.
- 2.2. To effectively make disciples, we must learn the commands of Christ and then help one another to apply them in our daily lives. This is why we stress the teaching of Scripture and the building of close relationships – so that we can grow into the image of Christ. In fact, this is the primary task of church leaders – to equip the saints so that they can carry on the work of ministry.
  - 2.2.1. Ephesians 4:11-12 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> **to**

- prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.
- 2.2.2. Colossians 1:28 We proclaim him, **admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.**
- 2.2.3. 2 Timothy 2:1–2 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> And **the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.**
- 2.3. However, leaders are not the only ones involved in making disciples. Each believer is called to mature in Christ, and to help others to mature as well. This will require that each of us develop a close walk with Christ, and that we build close relationships with one another so that we can help each other grow in our faith. Discipleship is the process of helping one another grow closer to Christ. This includes learning to walk with Christ and becoming more like Him in our personal conduct (sanctification).
- 2.3.1. Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as **you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom**, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
- 2.3.2. Hebrews 10:24-25 And **let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.** <sup>25</sup> Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but **let us encourage one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
- 2.4. If the church does not feed, nurture, and disciple its own members, it will be stunted in its worship and will be ineffective in its service and outreach to the world. Only growing Christians can effectively serve God and the world around them.
3. Ministry to the World - Outreach (Evangelism and Mercy Ministry) (External)
- 3.1. The church is also called to reach out and minister to those outside of God's kingdom through missions and evangelism. As we saw above, this is part of the Great Commission and every believer and local church must take it seriously.
- 3.1.1. Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
- 3.1.2. Mark 16:15 He said to them, **“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”**
- 3.1.3. Luke 24:46–48 He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and **repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.
- 3.1.4. Colossians 4:5–6 **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.** <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

- 3.1.5. 1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect**
- 3.2. The major types of outreach
- 3.2.1. Local evangelism
- 3.2.1.1. Evangelism is sharing the gospel and making disciples of those who are part of our culture and who speak our native language. In evangelism, we reach out to our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and others with whom we have contact to share the Good News of what God has done for us in Christ.
- 3.2.1.2. All Christians are called to reach the lost with whom they have regular contact, and the church must have ministries to reach local unbelievers.
- 3.2.1.2.1. Colossians 4:5–6 **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.** <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
- 3.2.1.2.2. 1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect**
- 3.2.2. National and international missions
- 3.2.2.1. Missions is sharing the gospel and making disciples of those who are not normally within our daily or regular sphere of influence, usually those who are not part of our culture or who do not speak our native language.
- 3.2.2.1.1. This means as part of our missions support we may make disciples of those who are part of our culture but not within our regular sphere of influence. For example, we could support adults reaching English speaking Americans – the Navigators, or a crisis pregnancy ministry – but the midshipmen and young women in crisis pregnancy they are reaching are outside of the normal sphere of influence of most of our adult members, and we therefore would have little other opportunity to impact them.
- 3.2.2.2. All churches are called to be part of God’s worldwide mission. This is clear in the Scripture.
- 3.2.2.2.1. Romans 10:14-15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And

how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

3.2.2.2. Luke 24:46–48 He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and **repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.

3.3. Evangelism and missions can (and sometimes should) include mercy ministry, and not only verbal proclamation

3.3.1. Mercy ministries (providing physical or practical help) is part of our call to be good neighbors and to act like our Father in heaven.

3.3.1.1. Luke 6:27-28, 35-36: But I tell you who hear me: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.** But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and **you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

3.3.1.2. Galatians 6:9–10 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, **let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**

3.3.1.3. Ephesians 4:28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, **that he may have something to share with those in need.**

3.3.2. Mercy ministries (providing physical or practical help) can be a valuable means of opening doors for evangelism and missions. Jesus Himself often healed and did good works and then doors were opened for Him to proclaim the Good News. Consequently, the Church can do mercy ministries and pray that God would use this service to open doors for the Gospel.