

What We Believe: Knowing and Loving our Doctrines
 Adult Sunday Studies 2023-24
 19 | The Church & Church Gov't

**WHERE REDEMPTION IS APPLIED:
 THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION, INSTITUTION, AND GOVERNMENT**

1. The Presence of God in the OT

1. Eden and then occasional altars and spaces in Genesis

2. Tabernacle - Exodus 40:34-38

1. Not just anyone could approach it (Exod. 33.4-6) and this was where Moses spoke to God "face-to-face" (Exod. 33.7-11)
2. This is what set Israel apart from all other nations - Exod. 33.12-16
3. Purpose for God's dwelling - Exod. 25.8-9; 29.43-6 - *"I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am The Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am The Lord their God."*
4. After the heavenly model - Exod. 25.9, 40; Heb. 8.5ff.

3. Temple - 1 Kings 8:12-24, 27-30

1. All the purposes above from the Tabernacle are transferred to the Temple, the 'permanent Tabernacle'

2. Where is the Special, Saving Presence of God Found Now?

1. Jesus and the Church!

1. Body of Jesus being the new Temple - John. 1.18 [and the rest of the gospel!], Temple's curtain ripped (Matt. 27.51, Mark 15.38, Luke 23.45), Temple destroyed and raised in 3 days, etc.
2. If Jesus is the new Temple, and we are joined with Him, we too are becoming the Temple of God - Eph. 1.22-3, 2.19-22, 4.11-16, 1Peter 2.4-9)
 1. 1Cor. 3.16-7 - [divisions in the body led to Paul's rebuke:] *"Do you not know that you (pl.) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you (pl.) are that temple."*

3. "On earth as it is in heaven" is a guiding principle and motivation throughout Scripture (for another example, cf. Jn. 1.51 based on Jacob at Bethel in Gen. 28.12, as well as Heb. 10.19-20)
4. Main Scriptural metaphors for the Church: covenant assembly / gathering, place of mission, people of God, chosen nation, remnant, family, bride, body, building / temple, city, dwelling place of God
5. Note: "you" in plural form ("y'all") is overwhelmingly the use in the NT
6. **You could summarize God's purpose in the world as *not* selecting out individuals to get to heaven, but rather as working to gather a community into His presence on earth as it is in heaven!** (Acts 2.41-2; 1Peter 2.4-10)

3. What's the Purpose of the Visible Church? (this is why outside of the church there is "no ordinary possibility of salvation")

1. WCF 25.3 - "Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the **gathering and perfecting of the saints**, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto."
2. 25.4 - "This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them."

4. The Church as Communion

1. **Communion of Saints - You can't be united to the Head without also being united to the Body!**
 1. 26.1 - "All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged

to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."

2. 26.2 - "Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus."

5. **The Attributes of the Church** (from the Apostle's Creed; to be distinguished from last week's discussion of the "marks" of the Church)

1. **One**

1. If it's in communion with Jesus Christ in heaven as His Body, how could it be more than one? See Eph. 4.4-6
2. Unity of the church is a gift from Christ - see John 17
3. Denominationalism is *meant* to preserve unity - we believe that non-Presbyterians are part of the one body of Christ - without demanding strict visible unity on important non-essentials.
 1. We should of course grieve our divisions and work to unite as much as possible.

2. **Holy**

1. "Saints" literally means "holy ones" - so the church is that community that has been made holy by Christ. 1Cor. 1.30 - "*And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption*"

3. **Catholic**

1. "Catholic" simply means universal, which is similar to the Unity, but also expresses its **global** nature.
2. Just as there is no Jew or Greek in Christ, there is no national allegiance in the Church, it is catholic by its very nature because it is connected to the one Head in heaven.

4. **Apostolic**

1. "Reformed churches lodge the apostolicity in the succession of a particular ministry rather than of particular ministers. . . . In the NT,

the apostles had no successors. To them belonged an extraordinary ministry for an extraordinary period of the church. It was the foundation-laying era (1Cor. 3.1; Eph. 2.20) followed by the ordinary ministry of pastors and teachers (2Tim. 2.2). The apostles speak with magisterial authority directly from Christ himself, but they instruct the ordinary pastors who follow in their wake to receive and guard the deposit of truth rather than to add to it (1Tim. 6.20)." - Michael Horton

2. Remember the canonization process - the key test was "is it apostolic?"

6. The Church as Divine Institution

1. "*Divine*" - this is God's idea, not a human one
2. "*Institution*" - not a voluntary community like the YMCA or Lion's Club. We are a part of the church if we are Christians.
 1. Public profession is not one of choice, but of obligation and command from God - very entrance into life is through a public testimony
3. "A **solitary Christian** is seen to be a contradiction in terms."
 1. "The society of Christians is . . . not an accidental or voluntary union which has grown up of itself: it is a **union designed beforehand**, appointed from the beginning by God, and plainly contemplated and required in every page of the NT. There are **precepts** in the Bible addressed, not to believers separately, but **to believers associated together** into a corporate society; there are **duties** that are enjoined upon the body, and not upon the members of which it is composed; there are **powers** assigned to the community, to which the individuals of the community are strangers; there is a **government**, an order, a code of laws, a system of ordinances and officers described in Scripture, which can apply to none other than a collective association of Christians. Without the existence of a Church, or of a body of believers, as contradistinguished from believers individually, very much of what is contained in the Bible would be **unintelligible, and without practical application.**" - James Bannerman

7. **Understanding Church Power** [notes from James Bannerman's *The Church of Christ*]

1. **What Kind of Power?**

1. *Spiritual* - as opposed to physical or outward authority of the state, the Church's authority is strictly spiritual [we'll discuss this more next week on Church/state issues]

1. *Dogmatic - Dogmas [Word]*, or articles of faith - revealed in the Word, the Church is a "divinely appointed witness for God's truth" to those outside the Church, and a witness and teacher to those within

1. Anything but a spiritual authority is inconsistent with the goal, which is to bring men to faith and obedience - "a compulsory power can never secure my belief"

2. *Ordinances and Government [Sacraments]* - administrative and declaratory power, as channels through which the Spirit works

1. No physical influence, or temporal or coercive power, can be used

3. *Discipline* - admission to and exclusion from the fellowship of the Church

1. Confirm in their faith and obedience; or convict of sin and recover them by admonition, warning, censure, rebuke or excommunication

2. **Where does the Power Come From? - The Source**

1. **"The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Church"** - *directly from God by* "positive" institution, yet also including voluntary submission of human members. Why?

1. Christ commands his members to associate corporately

2. Christ appoints office-bearers after His ascension, and providing for their succession

3. Christ enacts laws for the conduct of the members and office-bearers

1. Precepts and promises to officers as rulers, not just teachers

2. Duties of submissions to the office-bearers by the members

3. Examples of power, "not of advice merely", such as the "keys of the kingdom of heaven"

4. *Both founder AND administrator*, not just one or the other
5. *Not in the Church itself* - "it is not the Church that governs and dispenses ordinances and spiritual graces in His name, and by reason of His original gift and endowment to her, but Christ who, **personally present**, governs and administers ordinances and blessing through the Church. The Church has no store of life apart from Christ being in it".
6. *Detractors from this:*
 1. Erastians - State has certain prerogatives within the Church, impinging on Christ's leadership, even if the political magistrate is Christian
 2. Roman Catholics - Pope claims authority reserved for Christ himself, and the Church usurps Christ's mediatorial office itself, as if it could be divorced from His person
 3. "High Churchmen" - power in the Church itself, apart from Christ or the recipient's union with Christ
2. *Other options?* Must be some sort of authority or power with any type of community; and must, by definition, include office-bearers and laws - without which, there is no society.
 1. *Delegated (from within)* - Private, voluntary and self-regulated societies, whose power is derived from the consent and appointment of the members. The Church includes this, but is more than this. Many Baptist, anabaptist, and non-denominational churches act this way.
 2. *Appointed, from the state (from without)* - i.e., judges appointed by the office-bearers
3. **How Far Should/Can it Go? - "The Extent and Limits of Church Power"**
 1. **Problems to avoid:** 1. *Overrate* - extending it beyond the bounds of Scripture; 2. *Underrate* - church power becomes merely human appointment and advice, not authority
 2. **Extent:** submit to Church power insofar as it is in agreement with the Word of God AND, in a subordinate sense, because it is emitted by the Church, which is itself instituted by God in His Word - lest there be no power that is binding *except for what the members otherwise consent to*.
Authority, by definition, cannot be limited by consent.

1. Church power is more and better than just a human power that is in agreement with the Word, which is **advice, not authority**
 2. If the Church is more than just a voluntary, humanly-appointed institution, than it must possess power outside of human consent; otherwise, there would be “laws without authority, ordinances without grace, and discipline without judgment” (239). Compare the judgment of a civil law court, which is pronounced and carried out regardless of the consent of those it applies to.
 3. **If power is only so far as consent goes, then the majority, in effect, becomes the office-bearers**, since the minority must obey the will of the majority.
 4. The danger of “personal collisions” looms large here, whereas in a Presbyterian case, the personal aspects can be extracted when a case is brought to a higher court.
 5. The “oversees”, “presbyters”, “rulers” and “pastors” are throughout Scripture NOT bound by the consent of the community
 1. “Reprove” and “rebuke” do NOT admit of being limited by the consent of those receiving it, although one would do best to persuade
 2. Obeying your elders, submitting to them, does NOT admit of such limits
 3. See Heb. 13.17; Luke 2.51; Rom. 13.1,5; 1Cor. 16.16; 1Cor. 5
- 3. Limits:**
1. *Spiritual* - excluding temporal or civil authority, like legal punishments or fines; as well as sacramental “charms”
 2. *By Christ, the Head:*
 1. *Declarative power - The laws are declaratory*, NOT legislative - meaning they merely explain, apply and declare the laws that Christ has already revealed. The Word of God alone has powers of legislation, enacting laws.
 2. **The powers are ministerial and subordinate** - office-bearers are merely servants with authority *derived* from Christ, carrying out the will of Christ, not their own. They may pronounce judgments based on the precedents in the Word of God, rather than starting their own precedents. [from Ch. 2, pp. 218-221]
 3. **By the Word of God** - forbidding any *addition or subtraction*

4. **By the rights, privileges, and liberty of the Christian people - freedom of conscience**

4. **What's it for? - "The End and Design of Church Power"**

1. **To the Church, directly; to the world, indirectly** (Cf. 1Cor. 5.11-13 - where church power is instructed to exclude from its fellowship an unrepentant sinner; but not to impose any restrictions with those in the world outside the church)
2. This does not diminish its mission, but limits its role as an office with power
3. It has no authority over those outside the Church, in the world, other than to witness for God
4. For the edification, not the destruction, of the whole body

5. **From our Book of Church Order**

1. 27-3 - "The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. In its **proper usage discipline maintains**: a. the glory of God, b. the purity of His Church, c. the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners. Discipline is for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7); therefore, it demands a self-examination under Scripture. Its ends, so far as it involves judicial action, are the rebuke of offenses, the removal of scandal, the vindication of the honor of Christ, the promotion of the purity and general edification of the Church, and the spiritual good of offenders themselves.
2. 27-4. The power which Christ has given the Church is **for building up, and not for destruction**. It is to be exercised as under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. As in the preaching of the Word the wicked are doctrinally separated from the good, so by discipline the Church authoritatively separates between the holy and the profane. In this it acts the part of a tender mother, correcting her children for their good, that every one of them may be presented faultless in the day of the Lord Jesus. Discipline is systematic training under the authority of God's Scripture. No communing or non-communing member of the Church should be allowed to stray from the Scripture's discipline. Therefore, teaching elders must: a. instruct the officers in discipline, b. instruct the congregation in discipline, c. jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and church courts.

3. 27-5 - Scriptural law is the basis of all discipline because it is the revelation of God's Holy will. **Proper disciplinary principles** are set forth in the Scriptures and must be followed. They are: a. Instruction in the Word; b. Individual's responsibility to admonish one another (Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1); c. If the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matthew 18:16); d. If rejection persists, then the Church must act through her court unto admonition, suspension, excommunication and deposition.