

LESSON 12

DOCTRINES OF THE CHURCH II

I. INTRODUCTION (PG. 46)

In lesson 11 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 we ended by discussing the marks of a true church, as well as those things that would make a true church more healthy on the scale of purity.

Well, it’s this last item that we’re going to explore in more depth in lesson 12. We want to know what God’s Word says about ordering our lives together in the context of a local church.

With that in mind, we’ll focus on Biblical doctrines surrounding five key areas: baptism, the Lord’s Supper, church discipline, church government, and we’ll begin by thinking about the right preaching of the Word.

II. RIGHT PREACHING OF THE WORD (PG. 46)

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 10:13-17, 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....***”

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. 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).

Let's read together 2 Timothy 3:15 – 4:5, **"and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."**

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).

Well, the belief of most reformed, evangelical pastors, Pastor Scott being 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."

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." 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 preaching helps to ensure that. After all, we're not finally concerned with 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." 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.

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.

III. BAPTISM (PG. 46)

We believe that Christian Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer, into the name of the Father, and Son and Holy Ghost; to show forth in a solemn and beautiful emblem, our faith in the crucified, buried and risen Savior, with its effect, in our death to sin and resurrection to a new life; that it is pre-requisite to the privileges of a church relation; and to the Lord's Supper, in which the members of the church by the sacred use of bread and wine, are to commemorate together the dying love of Christ; preceded always by solemn self-examination.

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?”**

New Testament: In these passages, *and in every other example throughout scripture*, 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 Catholicism: Roman Catholics would argue that infant baptism actually regenerates and makes someone a true Christian as well as a member of the universal church. 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 : 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) 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:

(invite students to summarize these two points in their space if they'd wish)

- 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) 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.

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?

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

2. Believers should be baptized by immersion. (pg. 47)

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 6:3-4, "**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.**" 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. (pg. 47)

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.

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?

IV. THE LORD'S SUPPER (COMMUNION) (PG. 47)

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 Corinthians 11:23-34 (*typo in handbook says 39*) is the first inscripturation of the Lord's supper, the text that we read every month before we celebrate the ordinance.

"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some

have died.³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.”

What is the Meaning of the Lord’s Supper?

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: *(students will need to record these)*

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.

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: *(students shall record these points)*

- **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).

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. 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 transubstantiated. (1 Cor. 11:26)]

- **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 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 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: (*record*)

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).

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. EBC 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. 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.]

Questions or Comments?

V. CHURCH DISCIPLINE (PG. 49)

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. 5:1-7 writes, "**It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ³ For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. ⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.**"

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 and 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, 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.

Hebrews 12:6, "**For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.**"

Galatians 6:1, “**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.**”

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. Church discipline then will work to prevent the “bad yeast” from corrupting the whole “batch of dough”.

Hebrews 12:15, “**See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.**”

1 Timothy 5:20, “**As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.**”

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?

VI. 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.

The three forms of church government

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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. 5:2) and matters of church membership (II Cor. 2:6-8). 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.

Matthew 18:15-17, **“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”**

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 Emmanuel Baptist Church want to abide by his rule for his church as the Spirit enables us both for our good and his glory.