

Marks of a Healthy Church

Session 3

Welcome/Opening prayer

Introduction

Review

I. Marks of the True Church:

- A. *The Right Preaching of the Word of God.*
 - 1. *Scripture is to be Preached and Taught*
 - 2. *The Gospel is to be Preached Accurately*
- B. *The Pure Administration of the Sacraments.*
 - 1. *Observe the Lord's Supper*
 - 2. *Observe the Lord's Supper Rightly*
 - 3. *Baptize Members of the Covenant Community*
 - a. *Churches Differ On Whom To Baptize*
 - b. *Churches Differ On How To Baptize*
 - 4. *Baptize Rightly*
- C. *Love for the Brethren.*
 - 1. *Commanded/Commended Repeatedly*
 - 2. *Includes Discipline – Ref. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession*
 - 3. *Necessary but not Sufficient*

II. Marks of a Healthy Church:

- A. *Expositional Preaching.*
 - 1. *Defined* - that preaching which takes for the point of a sermon the point of a particular passage of Scripture.
 - 2. *Priority* - from it, all the other marks [of a healthy church] follow
 - 3. *Centrality/Authority*
- B. *Biblical Theology.*
 - 1. *Defined* – The underlying truths of the Bible's great story. Preaching/teaching must be consistent with the full council of God's revelation of Himself.
 - 2. *Priority* – Paul wrote of it often (1&2 Timothy and Titus)
 - 3. *Complex/Controversial doctrines---* Must be addressed faithfully and fully
- C. *Biblical Understanding of the Gospel.*
 - 1. *Good News*– makes no sense apart from the bad news first
 - 2. *What it isn't* – Something to tickle the ears and make you feel good about yourself
 - 3. *What it is*– God has provided a way for us to be reconciled (and adopted!) to Himself

D. Biblical Understanding of Conversion.

1. *What it isn't* – repeating a prayer; starting to attend church; self-improvement program
2. *What it is*– a work of God; a responsibility of man; evidenced by repentance and faith

E. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism.

1. *What it isn't* – salesmanship; manipulation
2. *What it is*– telling the truth with integrity, fidelity, patience, humility, courage ...

Week 3

F. Biblical Understanding of Church Membership.

1. Introduction: **Question to ponder:** Is church membership still valid for 21st century believers or is it an antiquated church practice that has no relevance today? **Answer:** it seems that to a great deal of Christianity does not believe in the relevance of church membership – or even a commitment to a church at all.
 - a. George Barna found in a poll that 43 percent of adults who say they are Christians are “absolutely committed to the Christian Faith.”
2. What is a church?
 - a. A Christian word – you don't hear people talk about Buddhist churches.
 - b. It is not a building
 - c. Dever: 9 Marks: pg 149: “According to the New Testament, the church is primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God's grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.”
 - d. Composed entirely of believers
3. Why join a church?
 - a. To Assure Ourselves

^{ESV} **John 14:21** Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

^{ESV} **John 15:10,14** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ... You are my friends if you do what I command you.

- » Church membership does not save, but is a reflection of our salvation.
- » Accountability – we ask others to remind us of when we have seen God's work in our lives and to challenge us when they see that we may be moving away from God.
- » Further reading: Jonathan Edwards: Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God

- b. To Evangelize the World

^{ESV} **John 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

1) Partnering together to "send"

1. Trips to Guatemala
2. (SNAP) North Africa

c. To Expose False Gospels

» Refer back to session 1 lesson on The Gospel

d. To Edify the Church – Following Christ in many ways boils down to how you treat other people, especially those in your church.

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:19** Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

» Ref. "One-Anothers" handout

e. To Glorify God

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

^{ESV} **John 13:34** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

4. Desert Springs Covenant of Faith – *handout*

G. Biblical Church Discipline.

The purpose of church discipline is the spiritual restoration of fallen members and the consequent strengthening of the church and glorifying of the Lord. When a sinning believer is rebuked and turns from his sin and is forgiven, he is won back to fellowship with the body and with its head, Jesus Christ. The Goal of Church discipline, then, is not to throw people out of the church or to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline. It is not to embarrass people or to exercise authority and

power in some unbiblical manner. The purpose is to restore a sinning believer to holiness and bring him back into a pure relationship within the assembly.¹

1. Church discipline is not primarily negative.
 - a. Positive discipline - formative discipline. Like braces on teeth or a stake that helps a tree grow straight. Ex. Sermons, teaching, books - even this class is a church discipline in that it is designed to shape and form a healthy church.
 - b. One of the most commonly repeated verses in the Bible.

^{ESV} **Matthew 7:1** "Judge not, that you be not judged.

- b. In verses that follow, (Matt. 18:15-17; Luke 17:3; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Cor. 5-6; Gal. 6:1; 2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:19-20; Titus 3:2-11) we clearly see that God calls us to judge and admonish in some ways, so the best interpretation of this verse is to say don't assume you know someone's eternal fate when you are practicing church discipline.
 - c. Biblical Steps.

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:15** "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.

- 1) Step One: Confront in a spirit of humility and gentleness.
 - 2) Step Two: Confront with witnesses to confirm the brother has sinned and that he has or has not repented
 - 3) Step Three: Witnesses are to tell it to the church.
 - 4) Step Four: Ostracism - "Let him be to you as a Gentile and tax-gatherer" Treat him as if he were outside the fellowship.
 - 5) Ref. back page of DSC distinctive on Church Discipline - 2nd paragraph.

2. Biblical Example

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:1** 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

¹ Desert Springs Church "distinctive" on Church Discipline.

you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

- a. Paul did not hate this man – he didn't even know him, but the man was deeply deceived. He thought he could be a Christian while deliberately disobeying the Lord.
- b. "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord**"
 - 1) Again the purpose of church discipline is restoration – not punishment.

3. Five Benefits of Church Discipline

- a. For the good of the person who is disciplined
 - 2) People need to understand the seriousness of their sin. They need to understand that they are not in good standing with God. We discipline out of love for the offender.
- b. For the good of other Christians

^{ESV} **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.

» When there is a serious sin it needs to be addressed in public so others will take warning by seeing the serious nature of sin.
- c. For the health of the church as a whole
 - 3) Refer back to 1 Cor. 5:6-8 – a little yeast works through the whole dough.
- d. For the corporate witness of the church

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

 - 4) When there is no difference between the church and the world, the world has no desire to seek the church.
- e. For the glory of God, as we reflect his holiness (ref. Back to 1 Peter 2:12)

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Christians are supposed to be conspicuously holy, not for our own reputation but for God's. We are to be the light of the world, so that when people see our good deeds they will glorify God.²

H. A Concern for Discipleship and Growth.

^{ESV} **Mark 4:27** He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

^{ESV} **2 Thessalonians 1:3** We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

a. When growth occurs it is because of God. The growth of the Kingdom of God does not finally depend on us.

b. We should have a desire to grow. We have a responsibility to grow.

^{ESV} **2 Peter 1:5** For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

c. How do we grow? -- Review previous Marks

1. Expository Preaching
2. Biblical Theology
3. Biblical Understanding of the Gospel
4. Biblical Understanding of Conversion
5. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism
6. Biblical Understanding of Church Membership
7. Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline
8. Biblical Understanding of Church Leadership

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:2** Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

» To grow you must have a desire to know God's word

d. Good growth

² Dever, Mark, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Crossway Books, 2000 p. 190.

In his Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, Jonathan Edwards suggested that true growth in Christian discipleship is not finally mere excitement, increasing use of religious language, or a growing knowledge of Scripture. It is not even an evident increase in joy or in love or concern for the church. Even increases in zeal and praise to God and confidence of one's own faith are not infallible evidences of true Christian growth. What, then, is evidence of true Christian growth? According to Edwards, while all these things may be evidences of true Christian growth, the only certain observable sign of such growth is a life of increasing holiness, rooted in Christian self-denial. The church should be marked by a vital concern for this kind of increasing godliness in the lives of its members.³

- c. There is no such thing as a non-growing Christian. If you are a Christian, God has put a desire in your life to please him – to grow. That's not to say that there aren't times of stagnation, but like Ryan always says, it's like the stock market – usually – there are ups and downs, but a general trend upward.

I. Biblical Church Leadership.

A. Pastor = “shepherd”

- » Job description or function -- not a biblical office
- » “pastor” found only once in some translations (NASB), none in others (ESV)

B. Elders

1. A biblically qualified council of men that jointly pastors the local church.
 - 1) Not advisors to “the pastor.”

2. Shared leadership

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:17** Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

- a. Of 18 passages which mention elders not one describes a church as being governed by one pastor.
- b. Acts 15; James 5:14; Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17,28; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 1:1; 5:1 – all specifically point to plurality of elders.
- c. The Twelve apostles were equals – there was not a head Apostle, however Peter, James and John were “first among equals,” meaning their giftedness and leadership led them to be more prominent Apostles.

3. Male leadership

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:11** Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

- » Other verses 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:1-5; Col 3:18

³ Dever, p. 215.

4. Qualifications

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:2** Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

^{ESV} **Titus 1:6** if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

^{ESV} **1 Peter 5:1** So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

- » List of qualifications from all three
 - a. Above reproach
 - b. Husband of one wife
 - c. Temperate
 - d. Prudent
 - e. Respectable
 - f. Having children who believe
 - g. Not self willed
 - h. Not quick tempered
 - i. Not under compulsion, but voluntary
 - j. Not for sordid gain
 - k. Not as lording it over, but proving to be examples

- » Pray for leaders!

5. Servant Leadership

^{ESV} **John 13:14** If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

In summary, using Paul's great love chapter, we can say that a servant elder "is patient...is kind, and is not jealous...[a servant elder] does not brag...[a servant elder] is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly... does not seek [his] ... own... [a servant elder] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).⁴

⁴ Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership-An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, Lewis and Roth Publishers, Colorado Springs CO. 1995. p. 98.

6. Hebrews: Obey Your Leaders

^{ESV} **Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

a. Submission

1) Submission is fundamental to the Christian life.

» Rom. 16:19; 2 Cor. 2:9; Phil. 2:12; Philem. 21; 1 Peter 1:2,14

Christians are to be responsive to their leaders, yield to their authority, and subordinate themselves to them even when they have a difference of opinion.⁵

b. Watch over your souls -- Greater accountability before God

^{ESV} **Luke 12:48** But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

» Pray for your leaders !

^{ESV} **James 3:1** Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

» Count the cost !

c. Make their work joy, not grief

^{ESV} **3 John 1:4** I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

» Not With Groaning...

Godly leaders sigh over a brother or sister who willfully wanders after false teaching. They groan in sorrow over those who refuse to grow, learn, change, or receive correction.⁶

» Contentiousness – argumentative spirit takes the joy away from the work of elders.

⁵ Ibid, p. 268.

⁶ Ibid, p. 273.