

What is a “Good” Church?

Class 3: November 19, 2023

Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Orthodoxy (Doctrine)</u>	<u>Orthopraxy (Practice)</u>
• 11/5/23	Worship & *Preaching	Nurture Christlikeness
• 11/12/23	Mission [“Wrap-Around Ministry”]	Nurture Service
• 11/19/23	*Sacraments	Nurture Grace
• 11/26/23	Community & Fellowship	Nurture Empathy
• 12/3/23	*Discipline	Nurture Truth
• 12/10/23	Government & Leadership	Nurture People
• 12/17/23	Prayer & Repentance	Nurture Justice
• 12/24/23	<i>NO MEETING</i>	
• 12/31/23	<i>Food & Fellowship Day</i>	
• 1/7/24	<i>New Series begins</i>	

Difference between the Visible and Invisible Church

1 Kings 19:12-18

¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. ¹³ And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” ¹⁵ And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

We can rightly argue for strong definitions of a good visible church while also humbly holding to the truth that it is the Spirit who breathes life into sinners. “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD (Jesus) shall be saved.” (Joel 2:32, Rom. 10:13)

Difference between the church and other Christian organizations

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will enliven every member of the invisible church to use their gifts to go out and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even if it is not in or part of the visible church.

Two tests:

1. How does the parachurch organization talk about the church?

“(I)ndependence of the church is bad, co-operation with the church is better, service as an arm of the church is best.” (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, “Lausanne Occasional Paper 24”).

2. How does the parachurch organization relate to the sacraments?

Sacraments

Preaching of the gospel, administration of the sacraments, and church discipline (in short, “all things are managed according to the pure Word of God”). - *Belgic Confession*

Distinguish between the “marks that belong to the being (*esse*) of the church and those that belong to its well-being (*bene esse*)” (Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Christian Foundations; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 108).

WSC 92: What is a sacrament? A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.

“Christ is the matter, or substance of all the sacraments; since they all have their solidity in him and promise nothing out of him” (John Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xiv.16.

Baptism

Colossians 2:8-15

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

WCF 28.1

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His church until the end of the world.

“Christian baptism is a naming ceremony” (Edmund Clowney, *The Church*, 278).

When anyone is baptized, adult or child of believer, remind yourself of God's grace to you.

Lord's Supper

	<i>What is the Supper?</i>	<i>How is Christ present?</i>	<i>Who followed this view?</i>	<i>Where is this view taught today?</i>
Transubstantiation	A sacrifice for the righteous	The substance of the bread and wine are transformed into Christ's body and blood	Thomas Aquinas	Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic churches
Sacramental union	A promise for sinners	Christ gives us his true body and blood under the bread and wine	Martin Luther	Lutheran and many Evangelical Anglican churches
Memorial	A sign and ordinance for believers	The bread and wine are signs that represent Christ's body and blood	Huldrych Zwingli	Many Baptist and nondenominational churches
Spiritual presence	A means of grace for the church	Christ is spiritually present in the Supper, not merely as a sign but to accomplish what he promises	John Calvin	Reformed churches in the Anglican, Congregational, Baptist, and Presbyterian traditions

Jared Kennedy, "Chalk on the Table: The Story Behind Our Different Views of Communion," *Gospel Coalition*, October 31, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/story-views-communion/>.

1 Peter 1:19-20

¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you

A Good Church Nurtures Grace

How would you explain grace to an eight-year-old?

Exodus 34:6 – God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...”

“God’s gracious provision of the substitutionary death of Christ enables him to pronounce a verdict of ‘just’ or ‘not guilty’ on repentant sinners and to include them in his eternal purposes” (Gilbert Bilezikian, “Grace,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 899).

Romans 4:4-8

⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

“‘Gift’ denotes the sphere of voluntary, personal relations, characterized by goodwill in the giving of benefit or favor, and eliciting some form of reciprocal return that is both voluntary and necessary for the continuation of the relationship” (John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (2015), 575.

What does it mean to be a gracious church? To be a place of graciousness?

Colossians 3:12: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,”

Colossians 4:6a: “Let your speech always be gracious,”

“In a church called *tov*, when grace forms the culture, forgiveness flows freely between God and his people and between one person and another” (*A Church Called Tov*, 117).

Ken Sande, *Peacemaker*: “Forgiveness may be described as a decision to make four promises:

‘I will not think about this incident.’

‘I will not bring up this incident again or use it against you.’

‘I will not talk to others about this incident.’

‘I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.’”

“The Thing We Don’t Do” by Andrée Seu Peterson

Forgiving is the hardest thing you will ever do. That’s why most people don’t do it. We talk about it, cheer for it, preach on it, and are sure we’ve practiced it. But mostly the illusion of having forgiven is that the passage of time dulls memory. The ruse will come to light with hair-trigger vengeance when fresh offense hurls in to empty out the gunnysack of half-digested grievances.

I asked a few people if they’d ever forgiven anyone, and what it felt like. They gave me answers so pious I knew they’d never done it. I am at the present moment in the maw of temptation, and I can tell you there is nothing exalted about this feeling, this one-two punch to the gut that comes when you even contemplate forgiving, which is as far as I’ve come.

At first I decided I would forgive the person—and never speak to him again. This felt pretty good, but I saw the dissimulation in it at once. I alternately toyed with going to him to “tell him his fault” (Matthew 18:15), which is my biblical right, so there. I had the decree of rebuke written up in my head, a document of fastidious and plenary detail—all for his own good. A smarmy satisfaction accompanied the plan, so I nixed it. For now.

*In C.S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*, a woman confronted by an angel about forgiving her husband says, “Well, I have forgiven him as a Christian.” The phrase is meaningless. She then bulimically seethes for pages about his wrongdoing and her longsuffering.*

Keeping one’s mouth shut is commendable, and more than I have managed in the past. It will work as long as I don’t go near a phone or e-mail. But I am reminded that “Absolom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad” for two whole years after the rape of his sister Tamar, and it ate him alive till in the end he killed the man.

O my brothers, you cannot imagine the exquisite verbal retaliations I have hatched in the idle hours, each more perfect than the last: theologically impeccable, legalistically faultless, poisoned prose polished to a lethal point. Must I now relinquish these? Must I kill the little darlings? Are they not to see the light of day? Such a waste.

Forgiveness is a brutal mathematical transaction done with fully engaged faculties. It's my pain instead of yours. I eat the debt. I absorb the misery I wanted to dish out on you, and you go scot-free. Beware the forgiveness that is tendered soon after injury; be suspicious. Real forgiveness needs a time lag, for it is wrought in private agony before it ever comes to public amnesty. All true acts of courage are thus done in secret.

Pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Church in Manhattan shares the following letter from a man who once had to forgive a woman:

"I forgave her and it took me a whole year and I had to forgive her in small sums over that whole twelve months. I paid those sums whenever I spoke to her and kept myself from rehashing the past. I paid them whenever I saw her with another man and refused self-pity and rehearsal inside for what she'd done to me. I paid them whenever I praised her to others when I really wanted to slice away at her reputation. Those were the payments but she never knew them. However, I never knew her payments, but I know she made them. I could tell."

And now the unthinkable: not only to forgive but seek the good. Nature abhors a vacuum and Jesus admits of no middle ground between hate and love. Pray for him.

When you were a child you thought like a child, that pain was something to flee. Now in the adulthood of faith, suck up your hundred denarii, because someone took your ten thousand talents upon Himself (Matthew 18), and like a lamb led to slaughter and a sheep before its shearers was silent (Isaiah 53:7). He did not retaliate but "continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Be so awash in the ocean of His love, my soul, that the shortcomings of all human loves will, more and more, seem but a trifling thing.