

What is a “Good” Church?

Class 6: December 10, 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>The first class of a three-week series with Steve Shelby</i>	

Nurture People

“As any organization grows, there is a tendency toward ‘institution creep,’ in which the needs of the organization... begin to supersede the needs of the *people* in the organization” (McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov*, 121).

2 Corinthians 2:12-13

¹² When I (Paul) came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³ my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

“Paul – the greatest evangelist of all time – passed up the opportunity to preach the gospel because his friend Titus was not there” (Paula Gooder, *Everyday God: The Spirit of the Ordinary* (2015), 57).

Why do you think Paul made the decision mentioned above?

Government & Leadership

The **Trinity** is the foundation of government and order. There is a function of order among the three members of the Trinity.

- The Father is the **SOURCE** of the eternal covenant of redemption
- The Son agreed to **ACCOMPLISH** the eternal covenant of redemption
- The Spirit agreed to **APPLY** the eternal covenant of redemption

Principles of Church Government

- Robert Cannada and W. Jack Williamson, *The Historic Polity of the PCA* (1997)
 - *see the “Preface” at the end of this handout*
1. Jesus Christ is Head and King of the church.
 2. The dynamic of the visible church is the Holy Spirit.
 3. A pervasive Biblical principle is that we are to be in submission to one another.
 4. Governance by representatives designated by elders*
 5. The exercise of this power is to be ministerial and declarative of God’s Word and hence wholly spiritual.
 6. This spiritual ecclesiastical authority is to be implemented through a series of graded courts.

Three basic forms of human government

- Hierarchical / Prelacy / Episcopacy / Monarchy
 - Lutheran / Methodism / Anglican ----- RC / Eastern Orthodox
 - 1 Timothy 3:1-2
- Presbyterian / Republican / early Roman period
 - Presbyterian / Assemblies of God
 - Exodus 18, Acts 15 (16:4)
- Congregational / Independency / Democracy / Greek city-states
 - Baptist / Churches of Christ / most nondenominational churches
 - Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3

Group Discussion

What are some pros and cons of all three forms?

Accountability

“Accountability is the public face of responsibility, illustrated in our willingness to submit our actions to the judgment of others” (Paul Lakeland, “Accountability, Credibility, and Authority,” *New Theology Review* 19, vol. 1 (2006), 7).

- **Why is accountability important?**

Philippians 1:1-2

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*) and deacons (διάκονος, *diakonos*, servant, minister):

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Office of Elder

Acts 20:17-28

¹⁷ Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders (πρεσβύτερος, *presbyteros*, elder) of the church to come to him... ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*, overseer, bishop), to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

- πρεσβύτερος – *presbyteros* – elder
- ἐπίσκοπος – *episkopos* – overseer or bishop

The Office of Deacon

Acts 6:1-6

¹ Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a

proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

- **What does Acts 6:1-6 tell us about the offices of elder and of deacon?**
- **Who was the first deacon of the church?** (Mark 10:45)

What are the three courts of the PCA?

1. Session – elders of a local church
2. Presbytery – representatives from the local church in a geographic area
3. General Assembly – representatives from the local church (and from Presbytery for committees) for the whole church

Homework

- **To whom are you accountable?**
- **When was the last time you were held accountable to something in your personal life?**
- **How did that go?**

Preface to the Book of Church Order

<https://www.pcaac.org/bco/>

The BCO Preface is slightly modified from the Westminster Divines' preface to the form of church government as cited in "Assembly at Edinburgh," February 10, 1645, Sess. 16.

I. THE KING AND HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth, even forever (Isaiah 9:6-7); having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:20-23); He,

being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints (Ephesians 4:10-13).

Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, Prophet, King, Saviour, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminency, all the offices in His Church, and has many of their names attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor, Minister, Bishop and the only Lawgiver in Zion.

It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thus mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.

Christ, as King, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom; and to which things He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Ghost.

II. PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES

The Presbyterian Church in America, in setting forth the form of government founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, reiterates the following great principles which have governed the formation of the plan:

1. God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from any doctrines or commandments of men (a) which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God, or (b) which, in regard to matters of faith and worship, are not governed by the Word of God. Therefore, the rights of private judgment in all matters that respect religion are universal and inalienable. No religious constitution should be supported by the civil power further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others.
2. In perfect consistency with the above principle, every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ has appointed. In the exercise of this right it may, notwithstanding, err in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet even in this case, it does not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only makes an improper use of its own.

3. Our blessed Saviour, for the edification of the visible Church, which is His body, has appointed officers not only to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline for the preservation both of truth and duty. It is incumbent upon these officers and upon the whole Church in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing in all cases the rules contained in the Word of God.
4. Godliness is founded on truth. A test of truth is its power to promote holiness according to our Saviour's rule, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). No opinion can be more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon the same level. On the contrary, there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.
5. While, under the conviction of the above principle, it is necessary to make effective provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good character and principles may differ. In all these it is the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.
6. Though the character, qualifications and authority of church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of officer investiture, the power to elect persons to the exercise of authority in any particular society resides in that society.
7. All church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or by representation, is only ministerial and declarative since the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may make laws to bind the conscience. All church courts may err through human frailty, yet it rests upon them to uphold the laws of Scripture though this obligation be lodged with fallible men.
8. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever, but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church.

If the preceding scriptural principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of government and discipline, applied with pastoral prudence and Christian love, will contribute to the glory and well-being of the Church.

III. THE CONSTITUTION DEFINED

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word Of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, together with the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Book of Church Order*, comprising the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline and the Directory for Worship; all as adopted by the Church.