

Week Three

Quarter 3

The Purity and Unity of the Church

The Power of the Church

Outline

- The Purity and Unity of the Church (Chapter 44)
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There Are More Pure and Less Pure Churches

- Paul's great joy with the Philippians or Thessalonians was that there was an absence of major doctrinal or moral problems
 - Phil 1:3-11; 4:10-16
 - 1 Thes 1:2-10; 3:6-10; 2 Thes 1:3-4; 2:13
- Corinth and Galatia had such issues
 - Gal 1:6-9; 3:1-5
 - 1 Cor 3:1-4; 4:18-21; 5:1-2, 6; 6:1-8; 11:17-22; 14:20-23; 15:12; 2 Cor 1:23-2:11; 11:3-5, 12-15; 12:20-13:10

False Churches

True Churches

Less Pure

More Pure

Definitions of Purity and Unity

- Purity of the church – its degree of freedom from wrong doctrine and conduct, and its degree of conformity to God's revealed will for the church
- Unity of the church – its degree of freedom from divisions among true Christians

Signs of a More Pure Church (1)

1. Biblical doctrine (or right preaching of the Word)
2. Proper use of the sacraments (or ordinances)
3. Right use of church discipline
4. Genuine worship
5. Effective prayer
6. Effective witness
7. Effective fellowship
8. Biblical church government
9. Spiritual power in ministry
10. Personal holiness of life among members
11. Care for the poor
12. Love for Christ

References
on pg 875

Signs of a More Pure Church (2)

- Churches can be more pure in some areas and less pure in others
- Most churches will tend to think that the areas in which they are strong are the most important areas, and the areas where they are weak are less important (pg 874)
- Christ's' goal for the church is "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:26-27)

We Are to Work for the Purity of the Visible Church

- Any church of which we are a part will be somewhat impure
- Christians have no obligation to seek the purest church
 - Then they would leave each time they find a purser one
- Rather, they should find a true church in which they can have effective ministry and in which they will experience Christian growth
 - Work on the purity of that church
 - Stay there and minister
- Not all churches will respond well to influences toward more purity, and in the end either:
 - Close their doors
 - Drift into liberal Protestantism

Classic Liberal Protestantism

- Primarily man-centered (humanistic)
 - Horizontal orientation rather than vertical orientation
- Impure doctrine
 - Conversations and messages have very little genuine spiritual content
 - Little emphasis on a personal relationship with Christ
- Instead, move toward self-help advice in popular journals or from secular psychologists
- Such churches are moving from “Less Pure” to “False Church” status

New Testament Teaching on the Unity of the Church (1)

- Jesus' goal is that "there be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16)
- Jesus prayed, "that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me" (John 17:23)
- Paul reminded the Corinthians that they are "called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor 1:2)
- And later, "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10)
- He also encouraged the Philippians, "complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil 2:2)

New Testament Teaching on the Unity of the Church (2)

- Paul encouraged the Ephesians that they are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3)
- The Lord gives gifts to the church “for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13)
- Paul can command unity because there is an actual spiritual unity already in Christ for all believers
 - “There is one body and one Spirit” (Eph 4:4)
 - Though there are many members, there is “one body” (1 Cor 10:17; 12:12-26)

New Testament Teaching on the Unity of the Church (3)

- Teaching is to preserve such unity
 - “I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites” (Rom 16:17-18)
 - Those who promote “strive...dissension, party spirit...shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:20-21)
 - Jude warns that those who “set up divisions” are “worldly people, devoid of the Spirit” (Jude 19)

New Testament Teaching on the Unity of the Church (4)

- While we are to separate from other people, such commands are from unbelievers → NOT from Christians with whom one disagrees (pg 877)
 - “Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them” (2 Cor 6:17)
 - Them = unbelievers – see 6:14
 - Paul Tells Timothy to “avoid such people” (2 Tim 3:5)
 - Refers to those who are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it” (2 Tim 3:4-5)
- We are to work for the unity of the visible church

Brief History of Organizational Separation in the Church (1)

- Early separatists
 - Montanists – 2nd century
 - Donatists – 4th century
 - Monophysites – 5th and 6th centuries
- Great schism – 1054 A.D.
- Reformation – 16th century
 - Martin Luther was excommunicated in 1521
 - Anabaptists as early as 1525
 - John Calvin broke away in 1530
 - Anglican (Episcopalian) Church was excommunicated in 1570

Brief History of Organizational Separation in the Church (2)

- Why did churches break away?
 - Historically, it was almost always strong theological differences
 - Recently, for more selfish reasons
 - “Pride or self-glorification is the cause and starting point of all controversies, when each person, claiming for himself more than he is entitled to have, is ever to have others in his power...Ambition has been, and still is, the mother of all errors, and all disturbances or sects” (John Calvin)
- Other recent movements have brought back some unity
 - Charismatic movements
 - Bible study and prayer groups
 - Parachurch organizations

Three Types of Separation

1. “Separate organizations”
 1. Can still work together
 2. Members still have fellowship between organizations
 3. Example – many Protestant churches (church softball leagues)
2. “No cooperation”
 1. Organizations do not work together jointly
 2. Members still have fellowship between organization
 3. Example – Many Catholic / Protestant relationships
3. “No personal fellowship”
 1. Organizations do not work together jointly
 2. Members are not permitted any spiritual interaction (prayer, Bible study, etc.) with another organization
 3. Examples – Fundamentalists Baptists, Apostolic Lutherans

Reasons for Separation

- Wrong reasons
 - Personal ambition
 - Minor doctrinal differences
- Possibly right reasons
 - Major doctrinal differences
 - Reasons of conscience
 - Practical considerations

Doctrinal Reasons

- How far is too far?
 - Paul rebuked NT churches for many issues without telling “true believers” to leave and find a new church
- “Do not take him [a false teacher] into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 10-11)
 - “False teachers” is not the same as people who hold false beliefs
 - Such a visitor is teaching a serious heresy about the person of Christ, one that prevents people from having saving faith (pg 880)
 - John later uses the word “antichrist” for such teachers
 - This refers to a person, not to a church as a whole
- Such a separation would only make sense if the church was so far away from the truth that it would be a “false church”
 - This was the breaking point for Luther & Calvin

Matters of Conscience

- When a Christian has no freedom to preach or teach as his or her conscience, informed by Scripture, would dictate (881)
 - Caution and great humility are in order here
 - Seek the counsel of many informed believers
- “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14)
 - If your relationship with the church causes you to be dominated by those who have no evidence of saving faith, this may apply
 - Note that this does not forbid mere association or acceptance of help, but the giving up of control over one’s activities and the loss of freedom to act in obedience to God

Practical Considerations

- When staying will do more harm than good
 - Their work for the Lord would become frustrated and ineffectual due to opposition to it from within the parent church
 - Find little to no fellowship with others in that church
 - If staying would harm the faith of other believers or would hinder unbelievers from coming to true faith
- In all these situations, much prayer and mature judgment is required

The Power of the Church

- Definition – its God-given authority to carry on spiritual warfare, proclaim the gospel, and exercise church discipline

Spiritual Warfare (1)

- “For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor 10:3-4)
- Includes
 - Prayer, worship, authority to rebuke demonic forces, words of Scripture, faith, and righteous conduct
 - The power of the gospel to break through sin and hardened opposition and awaked faith in the hearts of unbelievers (Rom 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23)
 - Spiritual power that will render demonic opposition to the gospel ineffective (Acts 13:8-11; 16:16-18; 12:1-17; 12:20-24)

Spiritual Warfare (2)

- Paul found that he could use this spiritual power against those who were opposed to his apostolic ministry
 - “I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” (1 Cor 4:19-20)
 - Death to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)
 - Blindness to Elymas (Acts 13:8-11)
- The descriptions of spiritual warfare in Eph 6:10-18 (armor) and 2 Cor 10:3-4 seem applicable to Christians generally
 - “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Cor 10:3-4)

The Keys to the Kingdom

- “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:19)
- What do keys symbolize?
 - Keys always imply authority to open a door and give entrance to a place or realm
 - See Luke 11:52, Rev 1:18
 - Note “keys” not “key”
 - Authority to preach the gospel of Christ
 - Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-42)
 - Authority to exercise discipline within the church (next)

Exercising Discipline

- The phrases “binding” and “loosing” are like Matt 18:17-18
 - “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. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven”
- Authority was granted to the church not only to open the door of entrance into the kingdom, but also some administrative authority and regulate the conduct of people once they are inside (pg 890)
- The verb tense tells us that whenever the church enacts discipline it can be confident that God has already begun the process spiritually

Keys Conclusions

- 1 – ability to admit people to the kingdom through preaching the gospel
- 2 – authority to exercise church discipline for those who do enter
- Not to legislate what is morally right and wrong in a morally sense (that's God's job)

The Power of the Church and the Power of the State

- The church should never take up the sword to carry out its purposes in the new covenant age
 - “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight” (John 18:36)
 - Membership in the church and allegiance to Christ must be voluntary (pg 893)
 - The Crusades were a terrible mistake
- God does give civil government the right to bear the sword
- Grudem’s opinion – the civil government should not enforce laws requiring or prohibiting kinds of church doctrine, or abridging the people’s freedom to worship as they choose (893)
 - Christianity needs to not fear when put up against any other religion
 - Such freedom is rare in governments not influenced evangelical Christianity

Church Discipline (1)

- Restoration and reconciliation of the believer who is going astray
 - The primary goals are
 - Restoration (of the offender to right behavior)
 - Reconciliation (between believers and with God)
 - Not torture and humiliation
- The process (see Matt 18:15-17)
 - See if you can ignore it (love) → only applies to non-sin
 - If not, talk to them in confidence
 - If that does not work, go to them again with a few godly, respected participants
 - If that does not work, bring them before the church
 - If all else is rejected, remove them from the fellowship

Matthew 18:15-20

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. 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. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”
(NASB)

Church Discipline (2)

- Each step should eliminate >90% of the issues
- What to not do
 - Skip steps
 - The knowledge of the issue should be kept to as small as a group as possible
 - Gossip about the issue to others
 - Casually mention it as a “prayer request”
- Why do it at all?
 - Help that person get “right” with God
 - Stop sin from spreading to others in the congregation
 - Protect the purity of the church and honor Christ
 - It’s hard, but necessary
 - Not doing it when it should be done is your sin of omission
 - It is your responsibility

Church Discipline (3)

- Which sins should this be done for
 - The New Testament references tell us that all sins were explicitly disciplined that were publically known or outwardly evident sins
 - Examples
 - Divisiveness (Rom 16:17; Titus 3:10)
 - Incest (1 Cor 5:1)
 - Laziness and refusing to work (2 Thes 3:6-10)
 - Disobeying what Paul writes (2 Thes 3:14-15)
 - Blasphemy (1 Tim 1:20)
 - Teaching heretical doctrine (2 John 10-11)
- Leaders of the church are under more public scrutiny (1 Tim 5:19-21)
 - Their lives would likely have a widespread negative effect on others who see their lives
 - They are not “above the law”

Conclusions

- Find a “true church” and work diligently to purify it
 - Remember, since you go there, it can never be perfect
 - Seek unity in that church
 - Only consider leaving after much discussion, thought, and one of the following reasons
 - Doctrine
 - Matters of conscience
 - Practical considerations
- The church has the Keys to the Kingdom
 - Ability to admit people to the kingdom through preaching the gospel
→ so get evangelizing
 - Authority to exercise church discipline for those who do enter → if there is a situation, it is your responsibility to handle it biblically

Reading For Next Week

- Chapter 47
 - Church Government
 - Homework – questions 1-4