

The Doctrine of the Church (Protect and disciple)

Derek Berry
Calvary Baptist Church
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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was initially intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptist.church.

Perhaps you had a chance to watch the Grammy's last month. I personally didn't, as that's never been my cup of tea. However, my social media timeline was flooded with articles about Sam Smith's performance. I had never heard of that name before this incident, but apparently, he dressed up as a devil to perform his song, "unholy." This isn't particularly unique; many artists in various genres have gone out of their way to seemingly mock Christianity and its followers. Night show host Bill Maher calls "religion antiquated and dangerous." Although he uses the broad term "religion," he attacks Christianity solely. But not only are outsiders throwing stones at Christianity, but many who bear the name are proclaiming a false message. A well-known church and pastor in northern California are known more for their ridiculous claims of the supernatural and unorthodox teachings concerning Jesus than for the plain gospel message.

So, where does this leave true local churches? In a society where outsiders detest Christianity and label it as hypocrisy, and even some professors proclaim a false message, what is the local church's response? I would argue that the Bible teaches that the local church is to protect, display, and provide an apologetic for the gospel message. How do we keep false teachers out of our pulpits and thereby preserve the gospel? Through the congregation's involvement. How do we show the world that the gospel is good and promotes ultimate human flourishing? By displaying the gospel, which in turn provides an apologetic for the gospel. This is why Peter says this:

¹²Keep 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. -1 Peter 2:12

This is our call, church. Protect the gospel, and this is accomplished through members discipling one another. This will be our focus this morning. If you've been with us for the past three weeks, you'll know that this is the third installment of our *Doctrine of the Church* series, in which we examine an often-neglected discipline. In our first week, we asked, "what is a local church?" In the second week, we delved deep into the keys of the kingdom and the responsibility of the church in utilizing these keys. As priests, we're tasked with declaring what is clean and unclean, what belongs inside and out. But we also learned that priests work the temple. Therefore today, we'll consider what working in the temple looks like in our New Covenant context. Another way to consider this framework is the four New Testament responsibilities for church members.

1. Affirm gospel citizens.
2. Protect the gospel.
3. Disciple other members.
4. Share the gospel with outsiders.

We considered the first responsibility last week and will consider the following two this morning. If you recall, last week, we considered congregationalism as a biblical church polity and how this is also a mechanism for discipleship. In other words, ecclesiology, the umbrella under which church polity would fall, is not just for scholars but for the everyday member because it's how maturity occurs within a local church. Yet still, many will say that a church polity in which power is centralized is how we protect the gospel better, and it enhances our ability to guard the unity of the church. Therefore, we should have a pope, a bishop, elders, or cardinals to possess all the power to protect orthodoxy. That's always the argument given against congregationalism. So, is that true? Does this lead to better protection of the gospel?

I'd say no for two reasons. First, and chiefly, the Bible teaches otherwise. As Mark Dever has said, *we should respect the structures that God has put in place and trust his wisdom in doing so*. In other words, we can't outdo God in protecting the gospel. He has ordained the local church as the final authority regarding membership and leadership. Matthew 16 and 18 make this truth clear.

Secondly, brothers and sisters, we've seen the failed experiment before. Christian history gives us no encouragement to think that the more centralized a polity is, the more protected the gospel will be. Consider the Greek orthodox church or some of our country's oldest Presbyterian and Methodist churches. They've gone theologically liberal, denying the very gospel they were founded on. That's because once the leadership denies the gospel, so goes the entire church. By God's grace and providence, do you know where you can still hear the gospel preached as it was preached a hundred and two hundred years ago? In congregational Baptist churches. That's because if a false teacher creeps in, the members can remove them. And that's why congregational Baptists don't tend to go liberal.

So, our polity taken from Scripture is how we mature. And this polity isn't just about voting on issues, but it's also about protecting the gospel and disciplining one another. You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of this church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel's ministry in this church. We'll consider five ways in which we protect the gospel.

1. *Affirming gospel citizens and excommunicating those not in step*

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." - Matthew 18:18-20

This is what last week's message was all about. Now to the previous point, there are liberal Baptist churches, and that's what happens when regenerate church membership is not taken seriously. The gospel gets lost when churches get sloppy regarding whom they allow to exercise the local church's authority. Because then you have natural, carnal individuals casting votes not based on Scripture but instead on their sinful, unrepentant desires. So, congregationalism is probably the worst polity if regenerate church membership is not stressed. So as a recap, we preserve the pulpit for those preaching the church gospel by the congregation having authority

and say over who proclaims the Word; hence, the gospel is protected. And the assembly also keeps watch on whom they allow in so that those professing Christ won't give the church a black eye.

How often have you experienced individuals who want nothing to do with Christianity because of someone who claimed to be a Christian but was as vile and unrepentant as can be? Well, what if local churches made the heavenly pronouncement that we do not affirm this person's confession but come and commune with the right confessors confessing the proper confession? You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of this church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel's ministry in this church.

2. *By loving one another (Living in harmony)*

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

Living with other Christians and learning to love them in their sin is why the gospel is believable. Think about that for a second. What is the gospel? It is the message that we have offended a holy and righteous God; however, he sent his son to bear our sin and adopt us into his family. Now, what would make that gospel believable to outsiders? The followers of Christ modeling what they've experienced! This is Jesus' point in the John passage. In the local church, members will let you down! I will let you down. But that's kind of the point and design. God could have made us perfect, but he left us with issues so we could love one another through them. So the world should be able to peek into our everyday dealings with one another and smell the aroma of the gospel. This is highlighted when a diverse group of individuals can unite due to their solidarity in Christ. If the Spirit were to leave our church, hopefully, we would crumble! You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of this church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel's ministry in this church.

3. *Personal Holiness*

The gospel of Matthew presents a particular dynamic between heaven and earth throughout the book. Heaven refers to the domain of God's rule, and the earth represents the domain of sin's rule, which is why there's such a need for a heavenly representative on earth. John the Baptist proclaims, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* in 3:2. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* in 6:10. And then in Matthew 18 he grants the local church to represent heaven by making pronouncements on heaven's behalf regarding who's in and who's out.

We also find the sermon on the mount in Matthew's gospel, which presents an ethic for kingdom citizens. He begins this sermon with the words, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3)*. So he begins this sermon by explaining how one is to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And then, he lays out the heavenly citizen's way of living. Heavenly citizens don't hate, discriminate, or murder, but seek reconciliation (5:21-25); they do not exploit or use others (5:27-30); they honor God's common covenant ordinances (5:31-32); they speak

truthfully on all occasions (5:33-37); they employ their property to protect and equip others (5:38-42); they even love their enemies—“so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven” (5:44-45).

It's similar to the health products that companies are trying to sell. Usually, they'll find the fittest individual to advertise the product to appeal to others. We are that advertisement. The local church and its members' harmony with one another and personal holiness protect and displays the gospel.

Church membership should feel like the following:

- A small group of single young men visiting an old widow in the nursing home on Friday night.
- A small group of single women inviting an elder's wife to their study to learn from her.
- ...rebuking a man for the way he speaks to his wife.
- ...rebuking a wife for gossiping about her husband.
- ...rejoicing with a brother when he gets the job promotion that pushes him further than you.
- Members praying and pursuing evangelistic opportunities together.
- ...looking for ways to help raise one another's children and disciple one another's teenagers.
- ...thinking all week, “I can't wait to be with the whole family on Sunday.”
- ...having that awkward conversation where you confess sin and ask for help in the fight.
- ...regular meals, regular prayers, regular texts and emails, and phone calls and “just stopping by.”¹

This is church membership. You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of this church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel's ministry in this church.

4. *By knowing the gospel well*

Think about Paul's amazement in Galatians 1.

‘I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—’ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. -Galatians 1:6-9

He doesn't rebuke the pastors of the churches in Galatia, but rather the members, and tells them to reject even apostles or angels who teach a false gospel. And this means, church members, that you are responsible for studying and knowing the gospel. Then you can spot the fake bill.

¹ List taken from Jonathan Leeman's lecture

Believer, can you summarize the gospel? Can you explain the relationship between faith and works? Can you answer the question, “can a Christian live in unrepentant sin? Why or why not? Why is it important for a Christian to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity? These are the kinds of questions you’ll need to be able to answer to help guard the gospel, which is why I’m here! To equip you to answer these questions best and thereby do the work of ministry. Know the gospel and what the gospel requires in the church’s and a Christian’s life. You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of this church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel’s ministry in this church.

5. *Financial Giving*

The last way the church protects and guards the gospel is through its giving. Assuming the primary teaching pastor is indeed proclaiming the gospel, the local church supports him through their giving.

‘Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. -Galatians 6:6

There is much to say about giving in the New Testament. Suffice it to say; our giving should promote gospel ministry both in the pulpit and community. You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of this church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel’s ministry in this church.

Now to the third responsibility of church members. We’ve considered affirming gospel citizens and protecting the gospel, and now we’ll consider discipling other members.

What does it mean to disciple one another? I hear that phrase here often. During our prayer meetings on Wednesday evenings, I usually ask one of us to pray that we would be discipling one another. Here’s a straightforward definition. Discipleship is helping someone else follow Jesus. That’s it. The members of the local church are to help one another follow Jesus. Let’s consider Scripture.

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. -Ephesians 4:11-16

We’ll consider four observations from this text. First, the local church or the saints do the work of ministry. And what is that work? “Building up the body of Christ.” In other words, help others to follow and look like Jesus. Second, how long are you responsible for ministering to one another? Verse 13 says until we all attain the unity of faith, to mature manhood, to the measure of

the stature of the fullness of Christ. In other words, while we're on this side of eternity. There is no retirement plan. Third, why should you minister and build one another up like this? Verse 14: *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* Fourth, how do we perform this ministry of building up and discipling? Verse 15: *15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...*

This point gets picked up again in the following verses where Paul tells them to put off the old, ignorant self, and to put on the new self. Look at verse 25: *“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another...”* And then verse 29: *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”*

What are you getting out of this? The entire church is responsible for the ministry of the word. As a kid, I used to love hearing my voice echo. It fascinated me that my words continued to ring even after I was done talking. The ministry of the Word doesn't stop at noon. It starts in the pulpit, and then it reverberates throughout the church. This is why I frequently give you a question to consider during lunch after service.

So, what is the program of discipleship here at Calvary Baptist Church? I'm looking at it. It's all of you. The program is called “elder-led congregationalism.” Remember that elder and pastor are used interchangeably in the Bible. The program is the pastors equipping the body to disciple and care for one another well. Now that may play itself out in different ways. It may look like me equipping individuals to lead small groups in their homes, having a bible study here at the church, etc. But I'll tell you now that a cluttered church calendar is overrated. First off, we no longer live in a time where we can assume people will come due to programs. We have to build relationships with people in the community and get back to personal evangelism. But also, we don't want to clutter your calendar so much that you don't have time to do life with other members. So the call is to be a people-driven church, not a program-driven one.

A few more matters on discipleship. It starts with love. Notice how much Paul loves whom he's writing and discipling.

*2 Cor. 2:6: “I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant **love** that I have for you.”*

*Phil. 4:1: “My brothers, whom I **love** and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”*

We listen to the people we love. We're able to receive a rebuke from someone we know has our best interest in mind. So we must first ask how well we are loving others. Discipleship cannot take place apart from love.

Secondly, discipleship takes place through both instruction and imitation. Instruction goes back to this idea of the Word reverberating throughout the church. The New Testament not only

speaks of pastors instructing and teaching but also of members teaching one another. This is the heart of us discipling one another.

¹⁴I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. -Romans 15:14

Before we touch on imitation, let me give you a discipleship hack. An easy way to participate in church-wide discipleship through instruction is by coming and singing to one another on the Lord's day. Let's see what the Spirit through Paul says about singing in Colossians and Ephesians.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. -Colossians 3:16

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart... -Ephesians 5:18-19

What do you notice about both of these texts? They both instruct singing in the congregation as a communal and corporate exercise. I know this isn't popular in our day. Many churches encourage individualistic expressions of worship through singing. But is that what you get from these texts? Paul is ordering the churches to teach and admonish one another through their singing! What are some implications of these texts? Well, for one, we should be able to see one another if the command is to sing to one another. Therefore, churches that turn off all the lights do themselves a disservice. Secondly, we should be able to hear one another. And lastly, this informs the content of what we should be singing. Paul says, *¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.* So our songs must be theologically robust because the end goal is not to become overly emotional but to build each other up through God's Word. So songs that are vague, repetitive, and lack theological nutrition should be rejected.

Consider this saint as you sing these songs in the congregation.

So, sing with joy afflicted one, The battle's fierce but the victory's won, God shall supply all that you need, Yes, as your days your strength shall be.

In Christ alone who took on flesh, Fullness of God in helpless babe, This gift of love and righteousness, Scorned by the ones He came to save, Till on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied, For every sin on Him was laid, Here in the death of Christ I live.

This is the gospel! You get to teach the incarnation, the penal substitutionary atonement, and justification by faith all through these lyrics! This is a form of discipleship. So, sing and sing loud, beloved!

Imitation is also an essential aspect of discipleship.

“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1);

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7);

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9);

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings” (2 Tim. 3:10)

I remember eating lunch with a brother in Tyler, TX, and being disciplined by how he displayed grace to our incompetent waiter. That was highly instructive for me.

Not all discipleship will be on a teacher/student level per se, although some should be. Mature saint, it is good for you to find yourself discipling another young believer within the church. Young believer, find yourself in the company of a more mature saint for the expressed purpose of discipleship. This is a more formal relationship. And the goal is that the one you’re discipling can, in turn, disciple someone else afterward. But less formal discipleship is believers getting together to do life.

I’ll close with some practical ways of living out this discipleship weekly.

- Reading the Bible with other members
- Having spiritual discussions with members
- Praying for and with other members
- Holding other members accountable
- Confessing sins to other members
- Singing with and to members
- Doing life with members
- Love other members.

Pastor Mark Dever gives the example of a wedding band with a diamond. The band is what holds up the diamond in a ring. The diamond will get lost without a band properly keeping it in place. The local church is the band, and the gospel is the diamond. The church protects the gospel and keeps it in place. You, as a baptized Christian and ordinary member of this church, are responsible for protecting and preserving the gospel and the gospel’s ministry in this church.

Let’s pray.