

The Mission of the Church (Part 2)

I. Review

- Jesus began a great restoring work, and the church brings it to completion in union with Christ. The church age is about all that Jesus continues to do through his people (Acts 1:1).
- The essence of Christ's work is to establish God's holy city on earth, where all things are offered up to God in loving submission to his will (1 Cor 15:28).
 - "Heaven is a world of love," Jonathan Edwards wrote. Christ is bringing this world of love to earth *through his church*.
 - This means, first of all, that the church's mission is to *worship God* (part 1).

II. Being God's holy city, part 2: building up the body

- Eph 4:11–13 Christ gave ministers "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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..."
- Two modes:
 1. *Word*: Christ has given us the means of grace (the word, sacraments, and prayer) to build up his people. (A separate lesson will cover these.)
 2. *Deeds*: When members love each other, we build each other up (1 Cor 8:1; Eph 4:16).
- Hence two offices: elder/pastor and deacon.

III. Being God's holy city, part 3: living for God's honor in all of life

- All-encompassing commands for all disciples:
 - 1 Cor 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (see also Col 3:17; 1 Pet 4:11)
 - 1 Pet 1:15: "as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."
 - Matt 22:37–40: we are to love God with all that we are, and our neighbors as ourselves.
- Specific injunctions in every sphere of life: money (Luke 3:12–14; 2 Cor 9:7), marriage (Eph 5), employment (Eph 6:5; 2 Thess 3:10), politics (Rom 13; 1 Pet 2), etc.
- God is not merely about saving individuals. He has a corporate goal in view: a renewed society. The church is this new society.
 - "The church is humanity saved. The church is communion with God and one another in God; it is the future perfect city in an imperfect present. The church is salvation in social form." (Leithart)
- The Bible talks about *everything*, though not in the same level of detail.
- The church's responsibility is to preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).
 - We go as far as the Bible goes, but no farther. This includes conclusions based on "good and necessary" reasoning from the Bible (WCF 1.6).
 - We allow for legitimate difference of opinion (liberty of conscience).
- Examples: "A politician hears a sermon about justice for the poor, and he begins drafting legislation to assist them. A prominent businessman has

succeeded by cutting corners, but after a sermon on Zaccheus he repents and begins making restitution to the people he cheated. Hearing a sermon on loving one's neighbor, a manager in an auto plant changes the way he deals with his employees; an assembly line worker in the same plant is convicted of his ingratitude and laziness and strives to be a productive worker" (Leithart).

IV. Being God's holy city, part 4: gathering in the lost

- Acts 1:8: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (cf. Isa 12:4; Acts 13:47; Rom 10:17)
- Every member needs to be ready to share about their hope: 1 Pet 3:15.
- Our love for all is a key part of our witness (Gal 6:10).

V. Summary and application

- Hence our church's mission statement: "Covenant OPC exists to make disciples of Christ who: Worship God with joy (part 1), Work to advance God's kingdom (parts 2 and 3), and Witness to the world (part 4)."
- Does part 3 (living for God's honor in all of life) imply that the visible church should oversee the renewal of all spheres of society? That the rulers of the local church should implement social reforms, do the work of urban and political renewal, supervise the production of godly works of art, etc.?
- Answer: we discern several distinct God-ordained spheres of authority: the church, the family, and the state. Moreover, people can willingly enter into associations that involve authority: the school, the business, the non-profit.
- Church as organization vs. church as organism (Kuyper):
 - As *organization* (that is, what the church does under the direct oversight of its leaders), the church coordinates the matters directly in its sphere: the administration of word and sacrament, the encouragement and discipline of its members, care for the poor.
 - In each of these tasks, the organized church has no authority beyond what the Scriptures require (Matt 15:9; Col 2:20–22; Rom 14:4; Jam 4:12).
 - As *organism*, each member seeks to honor Christ in every sphere of life.
 - Example: the church commands children to obey their parents (Eph 6:1), but the elders should not micromanage what rules parents make.
- Let's practice keeping the organized church within the limits of its mission: should the organized church...
 - ... have a club or a magazine about discussing literature or art?
 - ... start a school to train children for their callings?
 - ... start a newspaper to report on events from a Christian perspective?
 - ... start a counseling center?
 - ... organize a homeless shelter?
 - ... renovate a trashy city lot into a beautiful park?
 - ... start a grocery store to address a food desert in an urban area?
 - ... lobby the government to address injustice?
- Sometimes the leaders of the church need to encourage believers to create their own organizations or groups, rather than managing things outside the church's sphere.