

Theology Matters

FALL SEMESTER 2025

Teaching: Nathan Riley & Steven Hill & Aaron Ledford
Theology Institute

9. Ecclesiology - Part 2

“The local church is a visible, earthly outpost of the heavenly assembly. It is a time machine which has come from the future, offering a preview of this end-time assembly.”

- Dr. Jonathan Leeman,

Church Membership: How the World Knows who Represents Jesus

Works Referenced:

- 9 Marks of a Healthy Church Overview: <https://www.9marks.org/about/> and [Healthy Churches: An Overview](#)

1. Expositional Preaching

Expositional preaching (otherwise known as expository preaching) is the investigation of a particular passage of Scripture whereby the pastor carefully explains the meaning of a passage and then applies it to the members of the congregation. **The main point (and tone) of a sermon, then, takes the main point (and tone) of a particular passage.** This is in opposition to the topical preaching showcased in the majority of evangelical churches, where Bible passages are woven together to support a pre-existing point.

The Bible has many examples of expositional preaching and teaching. Think of the Levitical priests who taught the Law (Deut. 33:10), Ezra and the Levites who read from the Law and gave the sense of it (Neh. 8:8), and Peter and the apostles who expounded Scripture and urged their hearers to respond with repentance and faith (Acts 2:14-41, 13:16-47).

On the other hand, God condemns those who “speak of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jer. 23:16, 18, 21-22).

2. Gospel Doctrine

There needs to be a proper understanding and necessary emphasis on the full gospel. Where many contemporary churches teach that Jesus wants to meet our felt needs and give us a healthier self-image, that is not the gospel. The gospel message is that we are sinners who have rebelled against our Creator. But Jesus took the curse that was rightfully ours and all that remains is for us to have faith in Him so God may credit Christ’s righteousness to our account. When we de-emphasize sin and damnation to make the presentation more friendly and less offensive we cease declaring the full gospel.

This emphasizes not only how we are taught but also what we are taught. In a sense this should follow naturally from expository preaching because the careful exposition of a passage should lead to sound theology. The majority of poor theology arises from a lack of careful Biblical exposition. Where there is poor exposition, we should expect to eventually find poor theology.

Luke 24:13-27 (ESV)

13 That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem, **14** and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. **16** But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. **17** And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. **18** Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” **19** And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, **20** and

how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.**21** But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. **22** Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, **23** and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” **25** And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” **27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in ***all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.***

Gospel Doctrine is of vital importance because all of the Bible points to Jesus.

3. Conversion and Evangelism

When we have a Biblical understanding of the gospel, we must then also have a proper understanding of conversion. Conversion is a new birth from death to life and is a work of God. It is not merely a change of attitude or a change of affection, but a change of nature. Conversion does not need to be an exciting, emotional experience, but does need to produce fruit to be judged a true conversion.

In the Old Testament, God promised to save His people by sending Messiah (Isaiah 53:4-5, Jeremiah 31:33-34, John 3:5-13)

The way we evangelize speaks volumes about how we understand conversion (and further, what we understand about the good news). If we believe that people are essentially good and are seeking Jesus, we evangelize using half truths and tend to elicit false conversions. When we present a watered-down gospel, we end up with a

watered-down church. We need to be faithful to present the full gospel, the good news with the bad, and leave the results to God.

Matthew 23:19-20, Romans 10:9-10, 14-15

4. Church Membership

Church membership is a privilege and a responsibility and needs to be regarded as such. People should only be members if they are dedicated to the church – in attendance, prayer, service and giving. To allow people to become and remain members for sentimental or other unbiblical reasons makes light of membership and may even be dangerous.

1 Corinthians 5:2, 12-13; 12:14, 21-22, 26-27

5. Church Discipline

Discipline guides church membership. The church has the responsibility to judge the life and teaching of the membership since they can negatively impact the church's

witness of the gospel. Leadership needs to be firm in discipline as this is an expression of love to the congregation.

Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

6. Discipleship

We need to recover true discipleship – discipleship that causes Christians to live lives of increasing holiness. The emphasis on growth needs to be directed at holiness rather than membership. True discipleship producing strong, committed Christians will present a clear witness to the world.

2 Timothy 2:2, Colossians 2:6-7

7. Church Leadership

Until recent times, almost all Protestants agreed that in church government there should be a plurality of elders (which means that there should be an office of elder and not merely one or more pastors in positions of leadership). This is a Biblical and practical model that has fallen out of favor in modern times.

Acts 20:17, 28, Titus 1:5, Acts 14:23, 1 Peter 5:1-5

8. Prayer

Many wrongly think of prayer as being a kind of mystical energy or religious ritual. But prayer is simply talking to God. It can include praising God, confessing sin, asking for needs, and even lamenting the brokenness of the world. In the Bible, individual Christians and churches are commanded to pray because God really listens and responds to the prayers of his people.

Where is it in the Bible?

Jesus taught his disciples to pray directly to God as their Father, to praise him for who he is, and ask him to provide for all our needs (Matt. 6:6-9).

He also said believers should ask boldly because God knows what we need and has committed himself to providing for us (Matt. 6:25-34).

James identified the reason for believers not having what we need is because we do not ask (James 4:2-3).

The early church regularly gathered to pray as they faced many challenges in advancing the gospel among the lost (Acts 1:14, 4:23-31, 12:5). Why is it important?

Prayer is so fundamental to the Bible that the Bible cannot be understood without it. This is because what God says demands a response from us. Proper responses to God's revelation include praising, asking, confessing, and lamenting to God in prayer.

9. Missions

Missions is church planting across significant barriers. To fill that out just a bit, missions involves churches sending qualified workers across linguistic, geographic, or cultural barriers to start or strengthen churches, especially in places where Christ has not been named.

Where is it in the Bible?

The entire Bible tells the story of God making a people for himself out of those who had been cast into darkness and death by Adam's sin and their own. He accomplished his people's redemption through Jesus Christ, the one who the Old Testament anticipates and the New Testament celebrates. This means that the entire Bible is rightly said to be about missions—God's mission to save.

In the Great Commission, Jesus bound churches everywhere to the task of disciple-making (Matt. 28:19-20). We know that local churches are the means for fulfilling Jesus's commission because (i) the apostles planted local churches wherever they went throughout the book of Acts; and (ii) Jesus commands new believers to be baptized—an ordinance normally given to churches rather than to individuals.

The book of Acts is all about the planting of and strengthening churches in order to advance the gospel. The individual letters of the New Testament also serve this end.

Revelation 7:9 guarantees that God's mission, which he is currently working through his church, will succeed. A "great multitude" from every nation will gather to him on the last day.

Why is it important?

Missions is important because God's primary objective in creating the world has always been to redeem a people through Christ for his glory (Col. 1:16-22). God calls churches to join him in this mission.

Notes: