

church

a ~~ten~~ nine-part series
parts 4-6



Study 4: The Presbyterian Churches

Getting Started

Give thanks to the Lord for the Presbyterian Church around the world and the good that it has done. Ask that we would learn and understand more about it today.

A couple of weeks ago we thought about Penne Pork dish being offered as a taster in a Supermarket. We noted that both the dish itself and a bite of the dish are both rightly called 'Penne Pork'. A bite is not part of the Penne Pork, it *is* Penne Pork. In this analogy, we also thought about how it relates to the original celebrity chef's version that it was inevitably based off.

What happens though when the recipe gets adapted and moulded by others? Some think it should have more tomato. Some think it should be light on the garlic. Others still want to add some chilli. Are these dishes all still Penne Pork?

Today where going to think about what makes Presbyterian Penne Pork...urm, I mean Presbyterian churches distinct and why in the one body of Christ we seemingly have so much division. Catholics and Protestants? Denominations and Independents? Is this ok? How do we explain it?

Read and Reflect

Two weeks ago, we recognised that all local churches are linked by the fact that they have a common relationship to Jesus through the Spirit of Christ. (2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:14) Together all the local churches in the world make up the one universal church. Hence it is right to say, as Paul does in his letter to the Ephesians, that...

Ephesians 4:4-6 - There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The church is one body yet, the church today is divided in many different ways. Even conservative estimates would acknowledge that there are thousands of different denominations of churches and even more independent churches.

1) How can this be if we are one body? What are your opening thoughts?

Read the following verses.

Gal 2:11-14 - When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

Acts 15:36-41 - Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. 39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

1 Corinthians 1:10-12 - I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 11 My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

2) What can we observe about the early church from these verses?

Herman Bavinck once commented, “all the divisions and schism that presently exist in the church of Christ basically already have their roots in the apostolic age.” (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol IV, p317)

3) Do you think this is true?

4) Do you typically think of the early church has being marked by division? Why/Why not?

We don't normally think of the early church being marked by division because we were primarily dealing with fledgling local churches. The only bond most of them had was through the Spirit of Christ. Later a church hierarchy developed that connected these churches but the hierarchy was then mistaken for the true essence of the church (i.e. 'your church has to be connected to this hierarchy for your church to be a proper church'). When this happened, church division became more apparent as it was drawn down divides between people.

We have discussed previously that one of the marks of a true church is the right teaching of doctrine. But because there is no infallible interpretation of scripture, there is reasonable freedom for believers to interpret scripture differently. Some interpretations fall so far outside the teaching of the apostles that it is rightly condemned as false. Other issues leave room for disagreement. We have to accept that somethings we will not understand perfectly in this world.

5) Based on last week's study, what are some of the issues where there might be freedom to disagree over? What cannot be disagreed about?

The most significant split that occurred in Christian history was begun by the Reformation, which was sparked by Martin Luther posting his 95 theses on the door of All Saints church in Wittenberg, Germany. This year we celebrate the 500th Anniversary of this event. In these theses Martin Luther criticised various church practices, particularly matters regarding salvation. Luther

and other Reformers originally wanted to reform the church from within but when the Catholic Church rejected Luther's and other's criticisms, the Reformers chose to break away from the political and governmental structures of the Catholic Church. Over the next several centuries many of the different denominations that we know today, including Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists and more, developed along both political and theological lines, mainly in Europe.

There is no doubt that the divisions of the church of Christ are caused by sin; 'in heaven there will no longer be any room for them', to quote Bavinck again. But, it should not be forgotten that God loves diversity in unity. There was diversity before the fall and in God's good end for his church 'every tribe and every tongue' will confess that Christ is Lord.

6) How does God use diversity caused by sin in the church to bring about praise for his glory?

7) What do you know about the Presbyterian Church of Australia?

Consider this excerpt from the booklet, *An Introduction to the PCA*

"The Presbyterian Church of Australia is a part of the Christian Church throughout the world. The Church's name comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*, which is the word for an elder or a mature Christian leader in the New Testament. The use of the name Presbyterian reflects the Church's aim to be faithful to the Bible's teaching on the Church, even in the 21st Century. In its wider use, the name Presbyterian has also come to include the distinctive doctrine, discipline, worship, laws and practice of the churches which returned to Biblical standards in Europe at the time known as the Reformation. Technically "Presbyterian" explains how the Church is governed. A Presbyterian Church does not function as an "Episcopal" or "top down" Church. There are no individuals with the power or authority of

bishops in the way that word is used in some churches today. Likewise, the Presbyterian Church does not function as a simple congregational democracy. Not all decisions in the life of a local congregation are made by simple majority at the congregational level. In keeping with the Bible's idea of the Church as a body, individual congregations share a connection with others."

8) What do you like about what this says about the Presbyterian Church of Australia?

9) Is there anything you aren't sure about or are concerned by? Anything you would want to learn more about?

You can read more from this booklet at the following address: <https://www.presbyterian.org.au/images/downloads/about-pca/An-Introduction-to-the-PCA-Booklet.pdf>

The main leadership body of a local Presbyterian church is called the Session. Here is another excerpt from the *An Introduction to the PCA*.

"The ruling and teaching elders in a congregation are the spiritual overseers for a congregation. In the Presbyterian Church, they are called a "Session" or "Kirk" Session. (The term Session comes from an old word referring to the sitting of a court and "Kirk" is an old Scottish word meaning Church.) ...Once ordained, an elder remains so for life unless removed through a process of discipline. However, when an elder moves from one congregation to another, he (or she) does not have an automatic right to become part of that congregation's Session. Although an elder is ordained for life, an elder may only exercise that office within a congregation when elected by the membership of that congregation. Session meetings are usually called by the minister, or by at least two elders through the minister."

Some of Sessions main duties are to:

- Exercise supervision over all activities and groups within the congregation and promote their spiritual vitality. This includes approving leaders of Sunday Schools, Choirs, Bible Study, and special purpose groups.
- Appoint the time and place for the meetings of public worship and for the observance of the sacraments. They also determine the suitability or otherwise of those who apply for baptism, and exercise due oversight over the celebration of the Lords Supper.
- Admit persons to the membership of the congregation, or as adherents, and remove persons from these privileges when necessary as allowed for by the rules of the church. They also make sure that proper pastoral care is provided for all communicant members through visitation, encouragement and personal example.
- Ensure that careful attention is given to suggestions for changes to the rules of the church.

10) What are benefits of having a church led by a Session? What are the drawbacks?

In Practice

11) As a member or adherent (see the link above for more information for definitions of these categories) of a Presbyterian church, what could you do to express support for being a part of a specifically Presbyterian church?

Finish up

Thank God for our time together and pray that we would make use of the blessings of the Presbyterian Church, and learn to work within its weaknesses.

Study 5: The Mission of the Church

Getting Started

Thank God that he asks us to join him in his mission and pray that by the end of this study we will understand what that is.

The 'mission of the church' has been a much-discussed topic through the 20th century.

Some suggested definitions have included:

The church is a servant church and does not have a mission, but is a mission: the church only exists in mission. The church is only separate from the world in order to serve it. (*The Church for others and the Church in the World: A Quest for Structures for Missionary Congregations*, Geneva, 1967)

The church's mission is to carry forward the work of God and what he is doing in the whole world, namely, the liberation of the oppressed. (*Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World*, New York SCM Press 1966)

The mission of the church is a reconciled and renewed creation and to keep the earth and serve it. (World Council of Churches, 'Report of the Report Committee', Canberra 1991)

While each of these statements of mission have some element of truth in them, they miss the main points that the bible emphasises when it comes to the mission of the church.

Beginning with Jesus, let's work through some biblical texts to develop a clearer conception of the main mission of the church.

Read and Reflect

1) In what way is Jesus the great Missionary? (John 3:16-17; 10:11-30; 12:30-33)

John 3:16-17- "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 10:11-30 - *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.*

14 “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. 17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. 18 No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

John 12:30-33 - *Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.*

2) What is the main focus of Jesus’ work as the great shepherd?

Ezekiel 34:11-12ba - *‘For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.*

John 10:11-30 as above.

Matt 9:36 - *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

3) What is the main focus on Jesus’ parables about feasting? (Cf. Luke 14:15-24)

Matthew 22:1-14 - *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his*

son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

13 “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

4) If these passages represent Jesus’ mission, and we are the church of Christ, how should Jesus’ mission shape our understanding of the church’s mission?

John 20:19-21 - *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

21 *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

5) If we are united to Christ through faith, is participation in his mission optional for the church? Why not? (cf. Matt 12:30, Lk 11:23)

Matt 12:30 - "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."

6) What are some of the metaphors that Jesus uses to describe how his followers participate in the work of gathering people to himself? What is encouraging about these images?

Luke 5:1-11 - One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding round him and listening to the word of God, 2 he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

6 When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Matt 9:37-38 - Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Perhaps the clearest description that Jesus gave of the mission of the church was his final instructions to the disciples in the book of Matthew before he ascended into heaven. These words have traditionally been called the Great Commission.

Matthew 28:16-20 - Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

7) What is Jesus final command? Does this fit with the metaphors of shepherding, inviting, harvesting and fishing? In what way?

In the Great Commission, we see how the truth within the initial definitions given at the start of this study can fit alongside the church's main mission to make disciples.

8) What does Christ tell his followers to do when they make disciples in verse 20?

Christ taught us to do much more than just make disciples. He taught us to love, serve, forgive, give, sacrifice. He demonstrated to us what true righteousness looks like, including doing things like serving, liberating the oppressed and renewing creation. The question is, are the things Jesus taught us to do properly the mission of the church? Are they things that Christ taught us to do, but not our mission as the church?

Tim Keller has addressed the issue this way.

"While the mission of the institutional church is to preach the Word and produce disciples, the church must disciple Christians in such a way that they live justly and integrate their faith with their work. So the church

doesn't directly change culture, but it disciplines and supports people who do. Another balance has to do with society's cultural institutions. Rather than taking them over, or avoiding them as a corrupting influence, or treating them with indifference---Christians are to be a faithful presence within them..."

9) What is the difference between social justice issues being the mission of the church, and social justice issues being something that Jesus taught his disciples to deal with?

10) Given the above discussion which of the below definitions of the church's mission do you feel is best? Why?

"The mission and responsibility of the church includes both the proclamation of the Gospel and its demonstration. From Jesus, we learn the truth is to be proclaimed with authority and lived with grace. The church must constantly evangelize, respond lovingly to human needs, as well as "seek the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7). By living out the implications of the gospel, the missional church offers a verbal defense and a living example of its power."

- Ed Stezer, 'The Missional Manifesto', *Christianity Today*

"The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship and obey Jesus Christ now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father."

- Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*

Regardless of how we define the relationship between the church's mission of making disciples and social justice issues, it should be clear that Christians are called to be involved with both. We are to make disciples (Matt 28:20), love our neighbours (Luke 10:24-37), and love our enemies (Matt 5:43-48).

In Practice

11) What does it look like for church like ours to be on mission and also loving our neighbour and our enemies?

12) What sort of spheres did your mind first go to? (e.g. business, politics, family life) How does it look different in different spheres?

Finish up

Thank God for the privilege of being his partners in Christ's mission and pray that we would faithfully serve him in it, day by day.

Study 6: The Vision of our Church

Getting Started

Pray that we would know and understand what the vision of our church is and that this study would give us great clarity as to how it lines up with the identity and mission of the church.

Read through Gosford Presbyterian Church's mission and vision statement.

Mission Statement

Enabling people by God's Grace to become complete followers of Jesus Christ

Vision Statement

Our vision at Gosford Presbyterian church is to glorify God by being a strong gospel and bible teaching church and prayerfully -

Welcoming: we will thoughtfully, sensitively and inclusively invite people into the community of faith and give them a sense of belonging

Strengthening: we will strengthen people in their knowledge and understanding of Jesus

Supporting: we will support each other by sharing our lives and following Jesus together

Serving: we will serve Jesus through daily submission to Him

Equipping: we will equip people to tell the gospel, make disciples and be effective leaders

Over the last several weeks we've spent some time thinking about what the church is, the importance of confessions of faith, and the mission of the church.

1) When you read through our mission and vision statements now, can you see how some of the elements connect with some of the things we've learned about church? What specifically?

We're going to work through each vision element in today's study and see how they fit with what we've been talking about.

Welcoming

"We will thoughtfully, sensitively and inclusively invite people into the community of faith and give them a sense of belonging."

2) How does this vision element fit with Jesus' story about inviting people to the great banquet?

Matthew 22:1-14 - Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'

3) How does this vision element fit with the great commission in Matthew 20:18-20?

Matthew 20:18-20 - Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Strengthening

“We will strengthen people in their knowledge and understanding of Jesus.”

4) How does this vision element relate to the importance of confessions and what we believe?

Hebrews 13:9 - *“Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.”*

5) We are the church of Christ and live in him together. When we physically gather with one another, what are some of the ways that we strengthen each other?

Colossians 2:6-7 - *“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”*

Supporting

“We will support each other by sharing our lives and following Jesus together.”

6) How do we support each other and share our lives together as the visible church? (See ‘Study 2’ for a reminder on what this is)

Colossians 2:12-14 - *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*

7) Why is it so important that we seek to share our lives with one another? What are the obstacles to us doing this? What are the cultural ideas that work against us doing this?

Serving

“We will serve Jesus through daily submission to Him.”

8) Is service to Jesus an essential part of the life of a true church? Why? In what way?

John 14:15-21 - “If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

9) How can we serve Christ both when we gather physically and when we scatter throughout the week?

1 Corinthians 4-11 - There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of

tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Romans 12:9-11 - Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

Equipping

“We will equip people to tell the gospel, make disciples and be effective leaders.”

10) How does equipping people in this way reflect the mission of the church?

2 Tim 2:1-2 - You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

11) What area are you serving in at the moment where you could seek to equip someone else to learn how to do what you are doing.

Finish up

Pray that we would be faithful to fulfil the vision God has given us for our church and that we would deliberately and prayerfully see it come to pass.

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