

Class Five

THE CHURCH

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

As we observed in our study of the Holy Spirit, God creates his Church by pouring out his Spirit to inhabit his people, both individually and corporately (**Acts 2**). By the working of the Spirit,

We cheerfully submit ourselves to the instruction and government of this church, and we promise to promote its purity, peace, and welfare by all means within our power, so long as we shall continue to be members.

the Church is the body of Christ, made up of individuals who serve one another through diverse gifts and ministries with a view to being built up in unity & love (**1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 4:11–16**). Therefore, to be a Christian is to be in an interdependent relationship with other Christians, reflecting the interdependent relationship of the members of the Trinity. We might say that there are two things that one cannot be alone: married, or a Christian. God has designed it so that we need one another in order to hold unswervingly to our faith, to be encouraged in bearing the fruit and gifts of the Spirit and to have our needs provided for. Because

Christians need other Christians to be the Church that God intends, the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers not to give up their habit of regularly meeting together (**Hebrews 10:23–25**).

THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

The New Testament teaches that the Church is made up of all who profess faith in Christ, no matter what nationality, gender, or station in life, for the only boundary-marker of the people of God in the New Covenant is the presence of the Spirit (**Ephesians 2:11–22; Galatians 3:26–29**). We reflect this truth when we say in the Apostle’s Creed on communion Sundays: “I believe in...the holy catholic church.” The word “catholic” (lower-case “c”) does not refer to the Roman Catholic (capital “C”) Church, but means “universal.” So, when we say that “we believe in the holy catholic church,” we affirm that we believe in the universal community of believers; that is, we believe that the church is not something man-made or bound by artificial barriers, or that can be solely claimed by one certain group or type of people. We also affirm that those who are part of the “catholic” church believe the same truth and share the same mission in the world.

PARK STREET CHURCH IS *PROTESTANT*

Even though all Christians are part of one universal church, the church has divided into different groups and denominations according to particular theological and organizational beliefs over the centuries. One major division took place in the 16th century with the Protestant Reformation. We get the word “Protestant” from the *Protestio* of the reformers at the Diet of Speier in 1529 regarding the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The word means “to witness forth”

(*pro* = “forth”, *testio* = “witness”), not “protest”. The first Protestants viewed themselves as those who “witnessed forth” to the truth of Scripture and the beliefs of the early church. The Reformers declared the following five principles to recover the gospel:

- (1) ***Sola Scriptura***: *Scripture alone* is the inerrant and sufficient authority for the Christian and the Church (as opposed to tradition)
- (2) ***Sola Gratia***: God bestows salvation to us by his *grace alone* (as opposed to the idea that we have some abilities or natural endowments to work out our salvation)
- (3) ***Sola Fide***: We receive salvation through *faith alone* (as opposed to works)
- (4) ***Solus Christus***: *Christ alone* accomplishes salvation for the people of God through his substitutionary atonement (as opposed to the mediation of the Church)
- (5) ***Soli Deo Gloria***: *To God alone be the glory*: Salvation is from God alone and has been accomplished for us solely by God.

Park Street Church is a Protestant church identifying with these five reformation principles.

PARK STREET CHURCH IS *EVANGELICAL*

As early as the 17th c. and up to this day, liberalism and modernism have affected the Protestant Church so that many congregations no longer adhere to the principles set forth by the leaders of the Reformation. In our day, Fundamentalism was born out of a desire to recover biblical truth and was a major emphasis between World War I and World War II. The movement got its name from 12 booklets published from 1910–1915 called *The Fundamentals*, defending the fundamental Christian truths against liberalism and modernism. Media and culture watchers assume that we are all Fundamentalists, but this is not the case. After WWII, many conservative Christians were dissatisfied with Fundamentalism because it had become reactionary, militant and anti-intellectual, and as a result modern Evangelicalism emerged (1940’s and 50’s). Billy Graham was the most prominent leader in the modern Evangelical movement. Among other things, he joined with others like Harold J. Ockenga (former minister of PSC) and Carl F. H. Henry to launch *Christianity Today*. Institutions that grew out of this movement include Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Lexington Christian Academy, the National Association of Evangelicals, and World Relief.

Beliefs essential to Evangelicalism are the centrality and exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. Fundamentalism holds these two beliefs as well; however, Evangelicalism may be distinguished from Fundamentalism by the following five concerns: (1) to do greater justice to the social implications of the Gospel without compromising the priority of the message of eternal salvation (**Micah 6:8; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 John 3:17**); (2) to avoid moralistic legalism (extra-biblical lists of do’s and don’ts), without neglecting to promote true holiness and Christ-like wholeness of character in the life of the believer (**Galatians 2:4; 5:1–26; Colossians 2:16–23**); (3) to avoid anti-intellectualism, which at times has characterized Fundamentalism (**Matthew 22:37; 2 Corinthians 10:5; 1 Peter 3:15**); (4) not to be literalistic with the biblical text, since the types of literature found in the Bible

indicate various reading strategies; and (5) to “major on majors” and so not isolate ourselves from fellow Christians with whom we may not entirely agree (1 John 4:19).

PARK STREET CHURCH IS CONGREGATIONAL

Besides being Protestant and Evangelical, Park Street is also Congregational. While Protestantism and Evangelicalism primarily reflect theological distinctions, Congregationalism primarily reflects organizational distinctions. The Congregational church in America has its roots in the time the Mayflower landed on the shores of this country, carrying those who desired to separate from the Church of England. A group of Puritan settlers in Salem, MA was defined as a denomination in 1646 with the drawing up of the Cambridge Platform. The convictions reflected in that document and that remain the bedrock of congregationalism today may be summarized in the words of Manfred Waldemar Kohl in *Congregationalism in America*:

Christ and Christ alone, was to be the power in the Church, the ruler of each congregation; the church was to be made up of the individual Christians in a given geographical place gathered together by Christ through their common love for Him; the Bible was the only authority needed for the testing of the faith of the church and for the common discipline of its life; the Covenant relationship — the relationship of men [and women] bound together not by law, but freely in the mutual agreement of love — was made the heart of the Congregational Way; ministers were to be elected, ordained, and installed by the members of the church themselves through the power vested in it by Christ... officers of the church were to be elected by its members, and each individual Christian was considered a member only of a local church and subject to censure and discipline only by that local church; Christians and their churches should regard it as their obligation to love, pray for, and fellowship with churches of Christ everywhere; the Lord’s Supper was to be freely offered to all Christians who love the Lord Jesus and are trying sincerely to live the life of Christian faith, even though they may be of a different persuasion.

Even though we hold to the autonomy of the local church, we do not believe that local congregations are to be independent of one another; rather, they are to maintain relationships with each other for strength and accountability. For this reason, Park Street Church is a member of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (www.cccusa.com), founded in 1949. The 4 C’s is a fellowship of congregational churches that are joined together for counsel, support and fellowship without imposing ecclesiastical authority.

COVENANT OF FAITH AND GOVERNMENT

Park Street Church definitely believes that congregationalism is not the only valid form of church government allowed by Scripture. Nevertheless, it is the organizational structure upon which we are founded. Therefore, in becoming a member of our church, you will be asked to commit to the church's covenant of faith and government. This commitment does not require that you be a congregationalist for the rest of your life; rather, it affirms that while you are here at Park Street Church, you will abide by its congregational structure.

ARTICLE II: COVENANT OF FAITH AND GOVERNMENT

WE PROFESS our decided attachment to that system of the Christian religion which is designated evangelical and includes the following professions:

WE BELIEVE that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice.

WE BELIEVE that there is one and but one living and true God, subsisting in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory; that this triune God created all, upholds all, and governs all.

WE BELIEVE that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and that through His life, death, and resurrection an atonement was made for sin and redemption was provided for all people.

WE BELIEVE that repentance for sin and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior is the one and only way whereby sinners can inherit eternal life.

WE BELIEVE the Holy Spirit regenerates the soul of the believer and brings people into saved relations with God, and that He is the Comforter and Guide of all who receive Jesus Christ as their Savior.

WE BELIEVE in what is termed "The Apostles' Creed" as embodying fundamental facts of Christian faith.

WE COVENANT to continue the same ecclesiastical and legal entity created on February 27, 1809, incorporated by Chapter 252 of the Special Acts of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on April 13, 1916, as amended, and to continue in the congregational form of church government then adopted and provided in Bylaws duly adopted by the congregation.

THE STRUCTURE OF PARK STREET CHURCH

Congregationalism is based on the belief that Christ has vested the authority of the church in the members of the local body, rather than in a hierarchy of professionals or bishops (**Matthew 18:15–20**). God has given each local body a plurality of leaders to serve, teach, direct and be examples (**1 Timothy 3**; **2 Timothy 2:2**). Because of this, membership is very important. It is the members of Park Street Church who lead in ministry, who are responsible to elect elders to represent them, who exercise and receive church discipline and who even own the buildings. The overall structure of the church could be illustrated as follows:



The role of elders and deacons

Elders are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church and its members, and have general oversight of all aspects of the church and its ministries. The *nominating committee* helps discern potential elders, and the members elect the elders to represent them. *Deacons* are responsible for leading the various ministries of the church and assist elders in providing care & connection for churchgoers.

WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Regarding the issue of whether women may serve as elders, three positions are represented at PSC: (1) complementarian (male headship in marriage & in church); (2) egalitarian (equality of roles for men & women in marriage & in church); (3) midpoint position (male headship in marriage; equality of roles for men & women in the church). The teaching staff of PSC holds the midpoint position (see “Women in Leadership: Notes on the Gender Question and Related Biblical Texts” by G. Hugenberger, on the PSC web site), while a diversity of positions is reflected on board of elders. We do not believe this is an issue to divide over, which is demonstrated by the fact that we have had men who hold the complementarian position serving on our board of elders alongside men and women who hold egalitarian and midpoint positions.

Questions for

REVIEW, THOUGHT & DISCUSSION

1. If someone were to approach you and say, “I can be a perfectly good Christian and not go to church,” how would you answer?
2. What does it mean to “be the Church”? How have you experienced this at PSC; or, in what ways would you hope to experience this at PSC?
3. In your own words, explain what it means to be Protestant? to be Evangelical? to be Congregational? Can you whole-heartedly identify yourself with each group? Why or why not?
4. How do we decide which issues are worth dividing over (i.e., breaking fellowship over) and which are not?
5. Have you met any of the elders of the church? You can find a list of them on www.parkstreet.org/leaders, and pray for them.
6. Make sure to read the “Window Into Park Street: For Members Only” on the next page and consider what ways God may have you serve now or in the future.”

WINDOW INTO PARK STREET

For Members Only

There are several service opportunities that are available only to members. These committees or positions require people who are committed to Christ and His church gathered at Park Street Church.

The **Board of Elders** consist of 12 individuals who are elected by and responsible to the congregation. They serve on three-year terms and oversee the spiritual welfare of the church and its members. They have general oversight of all aspects of the church and its ministries, are called to prayerfully seek and help implement God's will the church, to keep the church's vision before the congregation, and to deal with such church business as cannot be delegated.

Deacons are chosen by elders, ministers or other lay leaders to lead particular ministries of the church. Their appointment is confirmed by elders, and they are responsible both to the ministries they lead as well as to the Board of Elders.

The **Church Officers** include: **Moderator** (an elder), **Moderator-elect** (also an elder), **Clerk**, **Treasurer**, **Treasurer of Missions**, and **Assistant Treasurer**. All these are elected by the congregation and serve one-year terms that are renewable. **Elections take place annually.**

The **church by-laws** also describe four committees with by-law responsibilities. Their membership is open only to members:

- **Membership Committee** manages the New Members Classes. Members facilitate new members classes and listen to each candidate's testimony.
- **Missions Committee** oversees the missionary programs and budget of the church, including global, short-term, mid-term, and full-support missionaries.
- **Finance & Administration Committee** takes care of all the financial investments and expenditures for the ministry, operations, and facilities of the church.
- **Nominating Committee** of 12 members serving three-year terms has the important task of nominating members for the positions of elder and church offices. This entails prayerful discernment and meeting with potential candidates.

Additionally, only members are allowed to serve communion.

Finally, only active members of legal age are allowed to vote for the elders, officers, nominating committee, budgets, and other business items at the annual meeting in February.