

The Church That Jesus Is Building

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Please take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2 and verse 36. Peter has been preaching to the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

! And he now comes to the conclusion of his sermon. It's Acts chapter 2 and verse 36.

Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do? And Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. With many other words, he warned them and he pleaded with them, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

[1:18] Those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Three weeks ago when our brother from Grand Rapids gave his report on the Far East, he spoke of the great need for biblically ordered churches.

Do you remember that? The need for biblically ordered churches in that land. There are many first generation Christians with no background in the church who do not understand church life as ordered by the New Testament according to the mind of Christ.

[2:38] And so the church situation there is somewhat chaotic with people doing what seems right in their own eyes. In our own land, many have had the biblical model for many years but have grown tired of it and have taken liberties to develop new and improved models of church.

Models that are more appealing to the masses and more in touch with their felt needs. Many professing Christians have little use for the organized church, as they say, with membership and with established leaders and regard such things as man-made religion.

It's enough for them just to belong to the universal church. And so they remain unattached to any local church. Can I ask you, where do you buy gas for your car?

We used to buy gas, didn't we, in the old days from Bob's garage or Carl's place or Jim's place. And when we pulled in, the bell rang. Out came Bob from under the car he had been working on with a smile and greeted us and began to fill our tank with gas and washed our windshield and asked us if he could check the oil.

And we liked Bob, and so we bought gas from Bob. And even if gas was a penny cheaper across the street, we were faithful to Bob and paid the 33 cents a gallon, weren't we?

[4:10] But how do we buy gas nowadays? Well, we drive in and we get out and we pump our own gas. And if the oil is going to get checked, it's going to be our handkerchief that's going to wipe it clean.

And we get what we want and we leave. We don't even need to go in and to talk to anyone anymore. We can just pay at the pump, can't we?

And so we can get in and get out. And so if the station across the street is a nickel cheaper, a gallon, we go there, don't we? Or am I the only German here this morning? Sure you go there. You buy what's cheap. The faithfulness to one place where you know the people seems to be a thing of the past. Some today treat churches much like gas stations, where there's little involvement with the people there.

They come and get what they want and they're gone. They bounce from one church to another. They come and go with no commitment to any one place. I've been reading the life of Chet Bitterman, the Wycliffe Bible translator, who back in 1981 was kidnapped and then martyred by political rebels in Bogota, Colombia.

[5:31] And he went to Columbia Bible School in Columbia, South Carolina. And at freshman orientation, the man up front said, Now, about churches.

We have enough churches in this town to entertain you with something new for years to come, if that's what you want. But church hopping is no good. Sunday morning smorgasbord keeps you from developing meaningful relationships with Christians off campus.

So we'll give you ten weeks to shop. And then we'll expect you to pick one church and to stick with it throughout your college years. Wow, that's different, isn't it?

They understood the importance of faithful churchmanship and sought to teach it to their students. But what is faithful churchmanship?

What is a biblically ordered church? For these answers, we must turn back to the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, and have him teach us his will concerning the church.

[6:37] Do you know the first use of the word church in the New Testament comes from the lips of the Lord Jesus? In Matthew 6 and verse 18, he says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not be able to overcome it.

From that simple statement, we learn that Jesus considers the church his. It's my church. He claims the ownership of it. He invented it.

He instituted it. He created it. He redeemed it with his own blood. It's his. So men are not free to tinker with it as they please to try to improve on it and make it what they want.

Jesus is the head. He's the one in charge with all authority who determines what is to happen in his church. And he's not relinquished headship to any pope, cardinals, bishops, pastors, church growth gurus, or any congregation for that matter.

The church owes submission to Christ the head. It's his church. And the second thing we see in that brief word is that Jesus is the one who builds it.

[7:48] I will build my church. So this is not something he subcontracted out and turned over to others and then walked away. Rather, Jesus claims to be active in building his church.

It's his work and he does it. That every member added to his church is done so by his almighty saving power. He's involved, you see.

He builds his church. Yes, he uses human instruments. But what are the instruments without the builder? What is a saw?

What is a hammer without the hand and the arm and the mind of the craftsman? And unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

Jesus says, I will build my church. So he builds his church and he builds it his way. You know, he didn't leave it up to converts to invent the kind of church that they would have.

[8:51] Rather, he selected 12 men and he spent three years of his life with them, teaching them, training them to build his church.

They're called the foundation of the church in Ephesians 2, 20 and following, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. But the apostles and New Testament prophets were the foundation of the church.

Jesus taught them to build his church and he would be doing that work in and through them. So they carried out the will of their head in this work.

Now let's consider two questions as we get started. What did Christ tell his apostles to do? And then what did they do? Those are not always the same, are they?

But we're going to look and see. First of all, what did Christ tell his apostles to do with regard to building his church? Now we don't have all of his words about this.

[9:53] He taught them much that's not recorded. But we do have his last words about building his church. In Matthew 28 and verses 18 through 20. Jesus said to them, All authority in heaven and on

earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And behold, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Here is Jesus' instructions to his apostles about how to build his church.

And we notice right away he claims all authority in heaven and earth to do this. Whatever nation he sends them into, he has authority there to build his church. So when they go, they go with his authority.

That's his encouragement to them. And what they do and what they build is by the authority of Christ. Now just what is the will of Christ concerning his church?

[11:02] How is it to be built? Well, there's three points. You see that. He wants his church to be an evangelistic church. He says, Go and make disciples of all nations.

And we'll see that's to be done by preaching the gospel. Preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. Notice what they're after. Not just decisions, but disciples.

They're after disciples. People who actually learn from Jesus and follow him. That's a disciple.

That's what they're to be making.

The church is to be made up of disciples of Jesus Christ. Secondly, we notice that disciples are to be marked by Christian baptism. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

So they're to be identified with me. All my disciples are to be baptized. They're to take on my name. To be identified with me and my people.

[12:12] My church. And so those who became disciples by believing the gospel and repenting of their sins are to be baptized into the church.

The church was to receive them. It was the initiatory right into Christ's church when they were baptized. They are to make disciples. Secondly, to baptize them into the church.

And thirdly, they are the churches to teach them to obey all Christ's commands. So you see the three points? Make disciples.

Baptize them. Teach them. Teach them. Now those were the authoritative directions from the head of the church on how he wants his church built.

Now we come to the second question. What did they do? And for this we turn to the Acts of the Apostles. It's a book actually that could be called the Acts of Jesus Christ through his apostles because he's the one building the church all the way through Acts.

[13:18] But he's doing it through his apostles. And we find in Acts chapter 2, the passage that was read for us, that it was by the preaching of the gospel and calling men to believe on Jesus Christ and to repent of their sins that they made disciples of Christ.

Followers of Christ. Peter said, God made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. He's preaching to the Jerusalem crowd that once crucified Jesus just weeks earlier.

And God made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. They're cut to the heart and they say, brothers, what shall we do? They're beside themselves. And Peter says, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

And those who received his message, that is, they believed, they repented. They were baptized, verse 41 says. And about 3,000 were added to their number that day.

They were baptized into the number of disciples in the church at Jerusalem. And the next verse, verse 42 says that they, that is, baptized disciples, they devoted themselves to what?

[14:39] To the apostles' teaching. Yes, the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Can you see how Acts 2 reads like an echo of Matthew 28?

Make disciples, baptize them, teach them to obey. Acts 2, these apostles with those instructions come to Jerusalem. Peter preaches and he makes disciples.

What do they do with them? They baptized them, adding them to the church there at Jerusalem.

And then what did the church do with them? They taught them to obey all that Christ commanded. And so verse 47 sums up that the Lord and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

You see, there's never an addition to a church that the Lord does not make that addition. He alone can make out of a sinner, a child of God, a living stone to be put into that temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

[15:45] So what the apostles were told to do is what the apostles actually did. Now, what about this complaint that we often hear about the organized church?

That people don't like the organized church with a membership that is recognizable and with established leaders in that church. Is that nothing but man-made religion?

Let's see. As we read on in Acts, we see this Christ building his church through the apostles. Over in chapter 11, you can see when the persecution arose during Stephen's stoning.

All but the apostles were scattered. They left Jerusalem. And wherever they went, they told people about Jesus, their Savior. Now, most of them were just telling fellow Jews.

But this text says that some actually went as far as Antioch and began to preach to Greeks. Also, Gentiles. Telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

[16:50] And the Lord's hand was with them. And a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. This is the Lord's hand because he's the one wielding the hammer.

He's the one wielding the saw, building his church through his apostles. So news of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem. And they sent Barnabas up to Antioch to check it out.

And when he arrived, he saw the grace of God and was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. And a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Even more came to the Lord as Barnabas went up to Antioch. And we might say, praise the Lord. Let's move on to the next place and get more people saved.

No, that's not how the text reads. Verse 25 says, Oh, do you mean that they planted a church there in Antioch when all those peoples believed the gospel and became disciples of Christ?

[18:08] Exactly. They planted, they organized, they established a church there. And now Paul and Barnabas come and they spend a whole year doing what?

Exactly what Jesus told them to do to disciples who've been baptized into a church. Teach them. And they taught them. It was a church that had recognized leaders.

You see it in chapter 13 and verse 1. This church at Antioch. It had prophets and teachers there. And you can see their names. It was not a free for all. No, there were recognized leaders.

And while worshiping, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them. And so after they fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them and sent them off, they went on their first missionary journey.

In chapters 13 and 14, follow them on their journey from city to city. What are they doing? They're going to do what Jesus told them to do. To build his church.

[19:10] I.e., make disciples, baptize them, and teach them. Did Paul do that? The apostle Paul do it that way? And Barnabas? Well, you can follow them through chapters 13 and 14 and see them go to Pisidian Antioch, to Iconium, to Lystra, to Derbe.

And in these cities, we read that many people believed on the Lord Jesus. And as you see in chapter 14 and verse 21, they want a large number of disciples.

Exactly. That's what they're to do. Make disciples. They want a large number of them. But that wasn't all. After going as far as Derbe, they turned around to go back to their home church at Antioch.

And along the way, they stopped at all those places where they had won disciples to Jesus. And notice what verse 26 says. I'm sorry, verse 23.

Verse 21. They returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. That's Pisidian Antioch. Strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said.

[20:27] And then verse 23. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church. And with prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord in whom they'd put their trust.

A lot of believers in this city. So they organized a church. And appointed leaders in that church. Do you see the pattern that is emerging through the book of Acts?

As Paul is sent by Christ to build his church. In each location where disciples were made, they were not left to live the Christian life in isolation.

But were gathered together and organized into local churches. It wasn't just a group of free-for-all fellowship. There was an organization to it.

There were leaders who were appointed and set apart for leadership. Publicly recognized by the church. Ordered according to the mind of Christ. So the New Testament knows nothing of this Lone Ranger Christianity so popular in our day.

[21:33] It's just me and Jesus and my Bible. No, the Bible knows nothing of that. Wherever there were disciples made, they were at once gathered in to an organized body of Christ's people called local churches.

And there they lived out the Christian life. They worshiped together. They prayed together. They took communion together. They served one another.

They evangelized together. And so those the Lord saved, he added to the local church. He added to their number. And all of this is Jesus himself building his church through his apostles, his instruments.

But notice that the church that he built was organized. With membership and with leadership. Further reading on into the book of Acts, we go with them on their second missionary journey. As Paul and company come to places like Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. Where again we read that many disciples were made.

[22:44] Now those names that I just read off are familiar names to us. Aren't they? Many of them are titles of books in our New Testament. That's because Paul wrote letters to the churches there.

You see, wherever he went and disciples were made, he got them together. And then he wrote letters to them. To the church of God in Corinth.

He established, he planted local churches. Again, demonstrating that that is the pattern. That is the mind of Christ.

To make disciples. And to establish ordered churches where they would be taught to obey all of Christ's commands. So the churches that Jesus built through his disciples were not undefined, unorganized fellowships.

But churches with clearly identifiable membership and clearly publicly recognized leadership. Now when I hear people say that they love Jesus in their Bibles, but they just don't like the organized church.

[23:54] I've been tempted at times to just ask, well what do you think Christ would build anyway? An unorganized church? It's ludicrous, isn't it? To think that Jesus would have an unorganized church.

What would you expect from the one who created all things? When you study the solar system that he made, what do you find? Chaos or order?

Oh, we find such order that men set their watches by the order in the heavens. And they're able to know exactly where in the night sky to look for certain stars at certain times of the year.

Because it's all in order with every star in its place. Or if you take the telescope and set it aside and look through a microscope at the human cell.

What do you find? Chaos or order? You've been told it's like a city. And you've got things all buzzing around in there. And each one is doing its own job.

[24:57] There's order within the little cell. Or take the human body. It's not just a bunch of body parts thrown together at chaos or random. But it's tremendous order.

And we get sick when it gets out of order. This is the mark of Christ upon all that he's made. Is order. Structure. Yet when Jesus builds his church, people holler if it's an organized church.

Something's wrong with that. Indeed, some do want it unstructured. They want it to be a free for all. They don't want leaders. They don't want commitment. They don't want a membership.

They don't want authority structures. They don't want rules. But to read the New Testament is to find that the head of the church wants his church organized. He established it that way with membership and leadership, structure and order.

Last Sunday night, I believe it was, the baptism service. Pastor Jason preached from this text. Where Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3.15.

[26:07] Who was a leader in the church in Ephesus. And he instructs him on how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household. Which is the church of the living God. Remember that text?

In other words, it's important that the people of God learn how to behave in God's household. Does that sound organized or disorganized? Sounds like it's an important thing.

And so Paul writes to Timothy and in that letter, he spells out how they are to worship with order. There's instructions for the men.

There's instructions for the women. He gives instructions on the kinds of elders and deacons that are to be set apart as leaders in these organized churches. Many other things about the care of

widows in the church.

The care of pastors and so on. And it all speaks and breathes structure. Organization. Not just a free-for-all fellowship. Now when the worship service in the church at Corinth became chaotic and disorganized, Jesus Christ inspired his apostle Paul to shoot off a letter to the Corinthians.

[27:13] And to bring order to the chaos. And to remind them that God is not a God of disorder. But a God of peace.

God isn't a God of disorder. Look at the heavens. Look into the earth. Look wherever you look. Look in the church and you will find he's not to be. He's not a God of disorder.

Therefore, everything about the church is to reflect that order. That government. That structure. That organization that's found in his work.

So a biblically ordered church is the mind of Christ. Now, I've said that one mark of the biblical ordered church is a clearly identifiable membership.

And we want to look at that for a moment. A clearly identifiable. It's recognizable who are members and who are not. Who are in and who are out.

[28:14] You could actually count them. Which is what they did. You saw that, didn't you, in the book of Acts. In chapter 1 and verse 15, we read, In those days Peter stood up among the believers, the brothers there, a group numbering about 120.

How'd they know that? Somebody obviously counted. Don't know exactly how they kept track of things.

Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 12 that the church of the firstborn have their names recorded in heaven. And it could very well be that that was exactly the same way that the churches on earth took as their model.

Indeed, we know that the church kept a list of widows that they were to care for. They were put on a list. But in one way or another, it was known who are members in this group and who aren't.

Chapter 2 and verse 41, those who accepted his message were baptized. And about 3,000 were added to their number that day. The very day that they were baptized, they were added to the number.

[29:17] So now there's 3,120 for you who are counting. Well, that number was constantly changing, wasn't it? We just read that day by day, the Lord was adding to their number.

Wouldn't that be wonderful? Every day the number's changing. They were added. It's a word they were attached to the group so that from then on they belonged to them.

And it was all the Lord's doing. He saved them. He added them. He joined them to the number of disciples in the church at Jerusalem. Chapter 4 and verse 4, But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about 5,000.

It was clearly identifiable. You could count them, and they did. Those who believed were baptized and added to the church. When you come to chapter 5, you find Ananias and Sapphira lying to the church about the price of the land that they sold and then donated to the church.

They were both struck dead by God for lying to the Holy Spirit. Remember, when you lie to the church, you lie to the Holy Spirit who dwells in his churches.

[30:27] And we read that great fear, verse 11 of 5, Great fear seized the whole church. We could understand why, couldn't we? I mean, if two of you were left cold as we left the church, great fear would seize the rest of us.

But it wasn't just the whole church. You see in verse 11, great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. Not everyone who heard about these events were in the church.

There's two groups here. But great fear seized them both. The church and all who heard. Verse 12 says, All the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade.

Verse 13, No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. They realized God's in that place. And if you're not serious about God, you could end up like Ananias and Sapphira.

So they didn't dare join themselves to them unless they meant business. Verse 14 tells us there were some. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

[31:40] They were joined to them. The word there is for glued fast. It's what a man does. He leaves father and mother and he cleaves to his wife. He's glued fast to his wife.

It speaks of a deep commitment. And that's the word that's used. That as men and women believed, even though it was such an awe-inspiring thing, that God was in the midst, they nevertheless were joined to the church at Jerusalem.

So those joined to Christ the head were also joined to his body, the church. They belonged, not just to the universal church, but to a local church. The church in Jerusalem.

The church in Antioch. The church in Corinth. The church in Ephesus. The church wherever it was found. Now there were wise reasons why the Lord Jesus organized his church with a clearly identifiable membership.

I want to give you two reasons. Number one, a clearly identifiable membership is necessary for church discipline to function as Jesus has appointed.

[32 : 49] The second use of the term church, after Jesus said, I will build my church. The second time church is used is found in Matthew 18. You're familiar with it.

It's the context of church discipline. Matthew 18, 15 to 17. If a brother sins against you, what are you to do? You are to go and to show him his fault, just between the two of you.

And if he repents, you've won your brother over. The deal is done. It's under the blood of Christ. Never need to mention it again. You don't mention it beyond just that brother in you. You got it straightened out.

It's over. But if he will not hear you, then take one or two along. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

Those are Jesus' words. That's Jesus' plan. Tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

[33 : 51] Now, how do you treat a pagan or a tax collector? You don't drive them out of the worship service. You don't treat them snarly and unlovingly.

No, you just, you can't treat them as a brother. They're no longer regarded as a sister, a brother in Christ. They're lost. And that's how we pray for them. And that's how we regard them. We love them. We want to see them saved.

But you can't consider them a brother in Christ anymore. They refuse to repent of sin. Now, you notice that's church discipline.

It's the way that Christ wants his church organized and ordered. There's structure here. There's principles. There's patterns, rules, and regulations for how the church is to operate.

But if we don't know who's in and who's out, who do you go tell when it says, go tell the church? Who do you go to? You don't know who to go to. But if there's a clearly defined membership, you know exactly who to go to, don't you?

[34 : 52] Well, it's necessary for church discipline. You see that in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians. You remember there, there was a member among them who had such an immoral lifestyle that he out-sinned even the pagans.

A man had his own father's wife. And he says, and you are proud. Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

Remember, a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. And as long as you keep that member among you who will not repent of his sin, it's like yeast working through the dough.

So get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast as you really are. Paul says, what business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?

Are you not to judge those inside? Well, in order to do that, you need to know who's outside and who's inside, don't you? Because one is your business, the other is not.

[35 : 56] So it is impossible to carry out church discipline unless there's clearly identified lines as to who belongs to this church, who is inside, who is outside.

Paul goes on to say in verse 13 in 1 Corinthians 5, God will judge those outside, but you expel the wicked man from among you.

He's on the inside, put him outside. Again, that doesn't mean bodily lay hold of him and throw him out in the snow. It means you put him out of your membership.

You no longer can regard him as a brother in Christ. He is a wicked man if he will not repent of his sin. So Christ's appointed church discipline can only operate where there is this clearly defined membership.

The second reason it's necessary is for spiritual leaders to function as Christ has appointed. Jesus Christ is the chief shepherd over his church, but he has established under shepherds to care for his

church.

[37:06] He's the head of the church, his body, but he's appointed under shepherds to watch over his sheep, and they do so with the authority of him, the chief shepherd.

Now again, we find today an aversion among professing Christians to put themselves under the authority of any man, any human authority. I don't mind being under the chief shepherd, but I will not put myself under shepherds, elders, pastors of local churches.

Well, that's to miss the point altogether, the fact that Christ gives authority to men he's chosen to rule over his church, and he will hold them accountable for how they use that authority in the day of judgment, whether they used it for the good of their people or for their harm.

But it's this way in every institution that God has established. Have you noticed that? Every institution that God established has this hallmark, this stamp of authority structure.

So we take the civil government. It is not good to have anarchy. God does not want anarchy in nations. He has established authority in civil government.

[38:34] Romans 13, 1 Peter 2, 1 Timothy 2. He's given authority, his own authority, to kings and governors and those who make laws and enforce laws to reward the good and to punish evildoers, to maintain peace and order and quiet because that's what he wants.

We turn from civil government to the home. It's not a free-for-all in the home, is it? We saw it last week in Ephesians 5. God made the husband the head of the wife, and she is to submit herself to him as to the Lord whose authority he bears in that home and he will have to give an account how he used the Lord's authority in that home over his wife and children are to obey and honor their parents.

There's authority structure in government of the nation, in the home, clear-cut and it's no different in the church. It's not an unorganized free-for-all.

It's not void of human leadership. It's not just that we're all under Christ and no, he's established a human order, structure, chain of command. God himself appoints men to be elders, pastors of his local churches.

Let me just read a few passages. Acts 20 and verse 28. Paul says to the elders of the local church at Ephesus, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

[40:14] In some way, they are over that flock of God's people. They're over them to watch over them. And he goes on to say, be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood.

Not all are shepherds. Some are sheep. All are sheep. But God has chosen out some to be shepherds. And he entrusts to those shepherds blood-bought sheep.

Sheep that he loved so much that he bought them with his own blood. And he says, now you take care of them for me. And when I get back, I'm going to judge you and see how you use this authority to shepherd them.

1 Thessalonians 5:12. Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you who are over you in the Lord. You see, there are some who are over others in the local church.

And it's in the Lord. It's his authority that he gives to leaders to feed, to lead, to recover, to protect, to care for his sheep.

[41:22] Hebrews 13:17. Obey your leaders. And submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account, obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you.

So not everyone in church is a leader. Not everyone has authority in the church. But where God gives leaders, he expects his sheep to obey them, to be followers.

Where God gives authority to men to watch over his sheep, he expects his sheep to submit to their authority. Those are the words God the Holy Spirit chose in Hebrews 13.

And he expects sheep then to put themselves under the God-appointed authority of elders in local churches. You see that?

Where God appoints one to watch over, he expects his sheep to put themselves where they will be watched over. Where one, God appoints one to rule, he appoints others to be ruled.

[42:32] But which sheep are we to rule? Which sheep are we to watch over? Which sheep will I give an account in the day of judgment for how I use my God-given authority for those who are entrusted into my care?

I say without a recognizable, clearly identifiable membership, the leaders don't know who the sheep are that they're going to give an account for.

It's not all sheep of Christ. I'm not called to shepherd all the sheep in Christ's pen, universal, not in your life, but only those in our flock, only those who God has entrusted to us here who have joined themselves to this local church and willingly placed themselves under the oversight and care of this body.

So apart from a clearly identifiable membership, the shepherds are at a loss to know which sheep they're to watch over, which have been entrusted to them, which ones will they have to give an account for in the day of judgment.

Now can you see the reasons why Christ's disciples are to join themselves to a church? Yes, they're to profit from God's appointed shepherds who are watching over them and to be under the overall discipline of the church, which is the mind of Christ.

[43:56] But I want to finish with this, that God has ordained, God has ordained that the spiritual growth and health of Christians takes place in the context of the local church.

The spiritual growth and health of the Christian takes place in the context of the local church, not in the context of the invisible church, of an unseen church members and Christians, but in local churches that have warm bodies of real, imperfectly sanctified disciples of Jesus.

And that's why baptized disciples were immediately joined to local churches. Immediately. the local church is the nursery for newborns where the newborns are placed right alongside of the older ones.

We don't segregate, oh, here's the youth group and they do all of everything they do by themselves. They worship together. No. It's the local church where newborns are placed beside older men and women who are to disciple them and to teach them to obey all that Christ has commanded.

The church is the nursery. Again, the church is the greenhouse for fresh plantings of the Lord to grow up in grace and in likeness to Christ. You know, the local church is where all the graces of Christ are nurtured and strengthened.

[45:31] It's in the local church that your patience will be tried. I should probably say has been tried. But you see, it's meant to be. In the local church, you will need to be patient.

In the local church, sacrificial love to another, putting others above yourself will be called into exercise as well as kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and forbearance and self-control and accountability and holiness.

These things grow not in isolation, not in some monastery, not in sticking to ourselves, but in the give and take of life in a committed relationship within the local church with all of its problems and imperfectly sanctified people.

You know, most of the practical instruction on living the Christian life in the New Testament is written to churches. churches. How do I live the Christian life?

Well, you love your brother. You don't just live for yourself. You serve another. You care for others in the body. It's in the context of the local church.

[46:44] Letters written to local churches. The local church is God's greenhouse for growth in grace. And this is where mutual comfort and encouragement are found in the local church.

Our dear sister Judy Withrow shared with us this past week in the loss of her husband, Ed, some dear soul that was concerned about her just asked her, Judy, do you belong to a support group? And Judy's answer made me want to shout glory with Billy Bray. She says, yes, I do. I belong to my local church. That's the support group.

Do you know it is the only God-appointed support group? I'm not saying that you can't get good out of support groups. If so, go for it. But I would say that the reason we have all these needs for all these other support groups is because either the church isn't doing its work as the support group or men and women are not being attached to that support group.

Maybe a little of both. But God has ordained that His church be a support group where we weep with those who are weeping and where we come alongside and we carry each other's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ where we encourage one another and build each other up.

[48:13] We are the support group that God intends for all of His disciples. This is where mutual ministry takes place in the body of Christ.

No Christian was ever meant to remain alone, aloof, unattached to the body. How long could a nose or an ear survive running around on its own? There goes the nose.

Yeah, she's a bit nosy. Look at her. That's all she is. She's just a nose. Never meant to stay on her own. She's always meant to be put in the body where she receives the ministry of all the rest of the members of the body and is able to minister herself as each part does its work.

It's the body of Christ where the spiritual health and vitality and graces of Jesus are brought to maturity. This is the mind of Christ.

You see, this is not some man-made rules or religion. This is how Christ the Head has organized His church for our good and for His glory.

[49 : 32] Where every disciple of His is joined and faithful to a biblically ordered church with a clear membership and qualified leaders and a healthy body life.

So, believers, have you been baptized and joined to a local church? Have you put yourself under the oversight of God-appointed shepherds who are to watch over your soul?

Have you put yourself in the God-given context where spiritual growth and nurture takes place?

Such an organized church of God is His plan for your spiritual good.

The one who loved you enough to die for you also built a church for your good where you are to grow up in Him and enjoy all the benefits that He is pouring by the way of grace through your brothers and sisters.

This is one of the ways that the church submits to Christ. We put our will under His regarding what true churchmanship is, what biblical ordered church life is.

[50 : 47] And if you're lost here this morning, there's something far more important than being baptized and joining a church, and that's getting right with God. You can only do that through Jesus Christ.

He's the one who bore the curse for all who trust in Him. Come to Him. Own your guilt, own your sin, and say, Jesus, forgive me. Trust in Him.

Repent. Turn from your sin and run into the arms of Jesus to save you from sin, from wrath that is coming. First things first.

Trust in Him and then you will be joined to Christ, the head. And then you'll be ready to be joined to Christ's body, the church. But first things first, all your hope for heaven must be in Christ.

We're going to sing that together from the overhead. Can you sing that this morning? My hope is in the Lord and in no other. If not, put your hope in Christ even while we sing.

[51 : 51] If any of you need to talk further with us about your soul or about baptism, about church membership, we always stand ready to do so. Let's stand and sing of our hope in Christ.

Upon a life I did not live, upon a death I did not die, another's life, another's death, I rest my whole eternity.

Amen.