

Biblical Insights on the Church

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[0 : 00] Tonight we're on ecclesiology which is the doctrine of the church. Church is ecclesia in the Greek and it means a called out people a called out assembly a congregation a community and so ecclesiology comes from that word ecclesia the doctrine of the church and the word church occurs 80 times and churches 37 times and really there's many churches not just one.

The word church is not found in the Old Testament although Moses led God's people through the wilderness and the congregation was a type or picture of the church so it talks about the church in the wilderness in Acts 7 38.

The church is a group of saved born again Christians called out of the world for the purpose of assembling together. Ecclesia means called out and so you see those verses there about the church of God which is at Corinth the general assembly in church of the firstborn and the church in the wilderness as in the wilderness wanderings of the people of God with Moses.

And there's different manifestations or pictures of the church so we've got them there the pillar and ground of the truth so it's like a column and the ground of the column because the church is organized by the one who is the truth the way the truth and the life and it's founded upon his truth. And then you've got the flock the people of God referred to as a flock of sheep as it says in Acts 20 28 take heed to all the flock to feed the church of God.

[1 : 38] Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders the church of God is like a flock and then we see it's referred to as a candlestick in Revelation each church of the seven had a candlestick which was a picture of the church and then we see the church is referred to as a body.

So it's a spiritual organism not an organization so much but an organism it's a divine institution it's the body of Christ and so there's that metaphor of that unity and all the different parts as it talks about 1 Corinthians 12 27 now are you the body of Christ and members in particular.

And so you can look at the churches like the church the body of Christ worldwide and then really each local church is a visible local church as that autonomous self-governing body.

So just on those two things we see the church universal it's this assembly the church is an assembly that's the meaning of it but really only can be local and the church universal is this concept that spiritual body composed of all believers of all ages united to God by faith in Christ really that exists only in heaven and it will not exist on earth till Christ brings it with him when the holy city the new Jerusalem descends from heaven.

The Bible puts the Bible puts the Bible puts the Bible puts the Bible on this idea of the local church. The local church is that physical manifestation of the church that visible body of baptized believers united to God by faith in Christ and we see the Bible talks about the church as sometimes a small company in a house the congregation of a town or city or a group of churches in a country or nation the church local.

[3 : 20] So it's got that location aspect to it we see that they met in appointed places for example they met in the upper room they met in the temple in people's homes and they met in the synagogues too.

So they had a place that they met and they met at appointed times too so really they met daily in a way you could say we're seven day Christians as in the sense we should be meeting we're meeting on a Wednesday so it's not necessarily on a Sunday.

But of course in Acts 20 verse 7 they did meet on the Lord's day the first day of the week which is the Sunday and they had regular hours of prayer together too. So they met at these different appointed times and the point is it was a location they met together in some location and it talks about how they assembled together they came together as a church they were at the place for example Corinth there the churches of Macedonia they had a geographical location they met together.

And so each local church is a whole church not part of some universal or mother church where some kind of make it more of a denominational picture but really every individual church if it's biblically based ideally it's got that self-governing it's autonomous it's an individual church and that is the picture of the church in the New Testament.

So over the page we've got the founding of the church and there's different views about when the church actually began. We would understand that the church was founded by Christ joining his ministry.

[4 : 53] In Matthew 16 18 he tells Peter thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Some like to say that the church began on the day of Pentecost that's really the common view.

But when you think about it the day of Pentecost was more the day of the empowering of the already existent church. It says but you shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you.

And it talks about how converts were added to the church at Pentecost. They did not really start the church. That's one way of looking at it. Some people actually think the church started in Genesis. Then some say the church started at the Ascension.

Others think that started when he breathed on them John 20 22 and said receive you the Holy Ghost. Some say the church started at Pentecost. But in a way you could consider that when Christ was baptised that he was the first baptised one and then the church has continued to baptise after that.

You could say perhaps it was at Christ's baptism. A lot of that's conjecture. We can't really be definitive. But certainly the church was founded by Christ in his ministry. Whether it was at Matthew 16 when he said on this rock I'll build my church.

[6 : 04] There's a degree of different interpretations on that one. The biblical vision for the church. We see that there. The primary purpose is to glorify God of course isn't it. And we think of the objectives of the church to edify believers.

To evangelise unbelievers. He says go ye therefore and teach all nations. So that sense where there's an edifying of the believers and evangelising of the unbelievers.

So twofold objective. Some of the purposes of the church of course ministry to God. Worship.

That's an integral part of the church. Prayer was always a fundamental part of the worship.

In Acts 12 5 when Peter was in prison it says prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. Scripture reading has been a central part of the church.

Singing was a vital part of the early church and an expression of worship. For example Colossians 3 16 says teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

[7 : 05] Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. So that's ministry to God. Worship. And then we see the next one. Ministry to believers is the nurturing part.

The purpose for the church gathered is for us all to come to maturity. It talks about unto a perfect man. Unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4 13. So the local church is involved in ministry. And that's evangelism towards unbelievers in the world. And then ministry within the church. In the church fellowship.

In the next section it talks about edifying. The edification. Which means a building up of one another. It talks about that in Ephesians 4 16. Of the church edifying of itself in love.

It's that building up and developing of members in their life and faith. The ultimate goal is to attain the complete likeness of Christ. It talks about the effectual working in every part in Ephesians 4.

[8 : 01] So there's some dot points there. Of the edifying. Every individual believer has a responsibility to edify the body. Encouraging one another.

1 Thessalonians 5 11. It says edify one another. Encouraging and provoking one another. Hebrews 10. Of course that familiar one that says. Not forsaking the assembling. But to provoke one another unto love and to good works.

There's that edifying. And then there's obviously the exercising of spiritual gifts too. In Romans 12. 1 Corinthians 12. How there's many members. Different offices.

Teaching is a fundamental part of the church. I know we've got discipleship training. We're encouraging people to grow. To learn. Teaching is an important factor in edification as well.

And of course the members of the early church. They devoted themselves steadfastly. To the teaching of the apostles. And then of course fellowship is a fundamental too. In Acts 2 42.

[8 : 59] It talks about the fellowship. Or koinonia. The sharing. Of the getting together of God's people. To encourage one another. Fellowship with one another. And of course there's lots of references in the Bible.

To one another's as well. In Romans 12 there it says. Be kindly affection one to another. With brotherly love. And you think about the fellowship of the church.

They had fellowship. Even in times of suffering. There's a strong fellowship. There was a fellowship in the unity. In Acts 4 31. When they had prayed. The place was shaken. Where they were assembled together.

There's a unity in the ministry that they shared. A unity in praying together. In coming around the Lord's table. And around meals. Breaking bread from house to house. So we see the ministry to the believers.

That nurturing. It's a really important part of the church mission. Another one is the mission to the world. Of course we've got a mission. And we're continuing our Lord's mission. Who says for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save.

[9 : 56] That which was lost. The proclamation of the gospel. And we're continuing that mission really aren't we? As God's people. That we're also following our Lord. Who's come to seek and save the lost.

Likewise we should have the same heart. Really the great commission. As they call it. It was repeated five times. To go into the world and preach the gospel. The early church continued to share that good news.

Even when it got them into trouble. And we see how they took the gospel to the lost. Whether it was in the temple or from house to house. Teaching that Jesus is the Christ.

And even the deacons too. We know Stephen and Philip. Both deacons. Who were involved in evangelising. And when they were scattered abroad. As the persecution ramped up with the stoning of Stephen.

They took the gospel everywhere they went. So the mission is to go and take the gospel. Another aspect of the church's mission is our mission towards God.

[10 : 55] We think of worship. We think of glorifying God. The ultimate goal of the church really. Whether it's evangelism or edification or whatever it is. To him be glory in the church.

And in Christ Jesus throughout all ages. Forever and ever. Amen. In the table there you've got some different pictures of some of the key scriptures.

As to the vision of the church. Largely about evangelism. The fellowship being together. The edifying. See the role of women in the church. There's different scriptures there. Of course that's a bit of a controversial aspect in some quarters.

But if we go by what the Bible says. We can be assured that we're being biblical. For example in Acts 21 verse 9. It does talk about Philip's four daughters. They had a role to prophesy.

We see in Romans 16 it talks about Phoebe. She was a servant of the church. So there is a place for women to minister. We're not against women ministering. But it's got to be done scripturally.

[11 : 53] And in accord with the word of God. So there's different references there. You can check out. There's certainly ministries for women. But not as a woman pastor for example. Because clearly a woman can't be the husband of one wife.

Mind you they can now. But that's another story. But of course biblically it can't be. So we've got to go with what the Bible says. The scriptures there about the Lord's Supper of course. One of the key features of the church.

Christian giving. For example 1 Corinthians 16 talks about laying by as God has prospered him. You see the offices of the church. Of course there's only two. Pastor or deacon.

Titus 1 talks about holding fast the faithful word. Church discipline is another area. Sometimes neglected in churches where there's no discipline. But we see that there is needful discipline.

A needful order. There's need to call heresy. Titus 3 verses 9 to 11. There's thankfully a restoration. And that's the angle.

[12 : 54] That's the emphasis for spiritual church discipline. The object is restoration. To restore the one who's fallen. And of course we see baptism. Clearly one of the ordinances of the church.

So there's two. The Lord's Supper and baptism. Some try to add foot washing. I'm not against foot washing. But I wouldn't call it an ordinance of the church. The Lord's Supper is certainly clearly an ordinance.

And the baptism of believers too. Then we've got preaching. Obviously another fundamental of the church. 2 Timothy 4. Paul says to Timothy preach the word. And Titus 1 talks about how he's manifested his word through preaching.

So moving on to the next section. We see about Israel. And the word of God talks to us about Israel. Clearly has a special place.

It's distinct from the church. Israel and the church are clearly established as different entities. Israel and the church, they're clearly distinguished. And the term Israel is used for the physical descendants of Abraham.

[13:56] Israel always means the physical descendants of Jacob. In all 66 occurrences in the New Testament, the term refers to Jews. Israel always means Jewish people. Because there's different views about some of that.

But clearly 1 Corinthians 10.32 spells them out into those three categories. The Jews, the Gentiles and the church of God. After the church was established, Israel continued to be recognised as people distinct from the Gentiles and from the church.

So there's a continuity in the sense that the church has got now that new role. In that sense that anyone who believes becomes part of the church now, whether they're Jew or Gentile.

And we've all got a place to serve in the church. There's an individual's purpose in the church.

We've all got a role to play in the local church. And so it's important as believers, of course, that we faithfully attend and support the church.

That we discover our spiritual gifts and develop them and use them to edify the body. And that there's that order in how that occurs. That we're all involved in that great commission of taking the gospel to every creature.

[15:03] And discipling those who trust the Lord. Next section is about the mission of the church. And we see that Ephesians 4 really captures a lot of that.

Ephesians 4 verses 1 through 16 talks about the unity of the church. There's a oneness. Ideally of that behaviour that's godly, of humility. And of that faith, that belief.

That we've got a oneness there, a unity. We can see a diversity too. That as much as there's different saints, we've all got something to give. And the ministry as well.

That the object of the church is that we're all going to be edified and learn together and grow together. And then that maturity, that's another object of the church that will, again, grow in grace and in our walk with him.

Next we see the role of men and women in the church. And here's another good section to maybe reflect on and study up later. It talks about the different roles of men and women in Titus 2 from verses 1 through 8.

[16:06] It tells us how the older men are called to be a teacher, sober, reverent, temperate, sound in the faith, loving, patient. Then of the older women, to be reverent, truthful, sober, a teacher.

The younger women, love your husband, love your children. Be self-controlled, pure, a homemaker, good, subject to your husband. And then younger men, be sober, a good example, sound in doctrine, sound in speech.

So it's interesting just to look at those different exhortations. Of course, we're all younger men and younger women here tonight. But of course, we can see how there's different roles, there's different addresses to those different ones, different exhortations to different groups of people.

God's got an assignment for all of us. And then moving on, we see the biblical basis for the church. It's founded upon the rock, the lordship of Christ. As we talked about before, that kind of classic scripture in Matthew 16, where Peter says, thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.

And we see that Peter was acknowledged for that confession of faith. And you can see in the notes how the word Peter is petros in the Greek. It means a small stone.

[17:16] And then later, the word rock, which is the word petra, which means a massive rock. So there's a distinction between Peter as this small stone and Christ as the massive rock.

As in Peter's statement, Peter's confession. Of course, the Roman Catholics make this say that Peter's the Pope and the church is built on Peter as a Pope. But that's not at all what it's saying.

It's more the confession of Christ that is the rock. That Christ really is the rock, as many cross references would show us. For example, 1 Corinthians 10, 4, that rock was Christ.

It talks about 1 Peter 2, the stone which the builders rejected. It talks about Ephesians 2, Christ the chief cornerstone. Clearly, it's Christ who is that foundation stone upon whom the whole building,

fittly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord's.

The essential truth is that Christ is the rock. He's the foundation stone, the chief cornerstone. Also, it tells us that Christ is the builder. We see that there. I will build my church.

[18:23] At the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. It talks about except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. And except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

So Christ is the builder of the church. He's going to build it. He is building it. And we're part of that construction project. And then Christ is the head as well. He's the head of the body.

He's the head of the church, the saviour of the body. He's the head of the body, the church. All of those scriptures there that you can see. That in all things he might have the preeminence. So he's the head.

It's not some man in Rome or some other headquarters of some particular denomination or other. It's not some man who's the head. But it's Christ who is the head of the church.

And that's really important to grasp that. That he is the one in charge. He's the one at the top. The Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one who is the head of the church.

[19:21] Not any human being. And you could reflect that really Christ was the first pastor in the sense that 1 Peter 2 it tells us that he's the shepherd and bishop of your souls.

And in 1 Peter 5 it says the chief shepherd. When the chief shepherd shall appear you shall receive a crown of glory. So it's very clearly that Christ is the shepherd. Pastor means shepherd.

Of course you could say the Lord is my pastor. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. And really he is the ultimate shepherd. But any human shepherds were only under shepherds under his shepherdship too.

And yet his church has leadership. We know when the Lord established his church as in the disciples he called them. He chose 12 disciples. He ordained them. He set them apart.

So they obviously had roles. And then we see some had more responsibilities. Or they were more closer to him. As in Peter, James and John they had some special trust.

[20:20] And we know Judas was the treasurer. And there was times where Peter handled payments as well. So there was like a system there that those practical things were covered too.

So Christ was the first pastor. And then we see that local churches are made of saved, baptised people who assemble together. As that familiar one says, Hebrews 10.

Not forsaking the assembly of yourselves together. As the manner of some is, but exhorting one another. So much the more. As you see the day approaching. There's a precious value of getting together.

And to not forsake that. There's a feature there. As you see in the notes. It tells us numbers of times. This key phrase. They came together as God's people. Obviously part of being in the church is being together.

It's that assembly. It's that gathering together. That's why it's really important to get to things if we can. And we see that the churches met together in different places.

[21:17] Even in houses at times. And one of the key features was that the meetings had to be conducted orderly. So 1 Corinthians 14.40 it says, Let all things be done decently and in order.

And there was a kind of system, a routine of the churches when they got together. There was a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation.

And with the object that all things would be done unto edify. The point is that there's a certain order to how the meetings are conducted. Another thing about the church practices was that there was collections made on the Sunday.

For example, we see that there in 1 Corinthians 16. That there was a collection for the saints. Paul says, I've given order to the churches. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store.

As God hath prospered to him. That there be no gatherings when I come. So there's a time when they assembled. And part of that was their giving to the Lord. And that time when they would assemble together too.

[22:21] Oft times during the week. And so it wasn't just the Sunday, as we said before. We see that Acts 2. That they're continuing daily with one accord in the temple. Because we'd love to see more of that really.

In modern days we don't always seem to get to that, do we? To have that fellowship time with one another. But that would be the ideal to see that. That we can have some interaction. Not just on one day of the week. But even daily, if it could be. And it tells us in Acts 5.42. That it says daily in the temple. And in every house they cease not to preach and teach Jesus Christ. Some thoughts on the government of the church. Of course, as we said before. Christ is the head. He's the shepherd. He's the good shepherd. The great shepherd. The chief shepherd. And we see the Holy Spirit is to direct the church as well. It's not the pastor who should be preeminent. Really no church member, man or woman, should want preeminence.

[23 : 20] We see that in 3 John verses 9 through 10. It rebukes the man diatrophies. Who loveth to have the preeminence. And that was spoken against. To have such a preeminence. Which is not wholesome. But we see that the Holy Spirit really takes charge. That we should submit all of us to the Holy Spirit. And it tells us that you shall receive power. After that the Holy Ghost has come upon you. And you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem. And in all Judea and in Samaria. And unto the uttermost part of the earth. And there's times we see those different references there. Where they sought what the Holy Spirit wanted. So for example in Acts 13. It says the Holy Ghost saith. Separate me Barnabas and Saul. So we see that there was a time where they sought God. And they understood the Holy Spirit's direction. And they followed that. Another truth about the church.

[24 : 17] As we see the biblical model. Is that really each church is to be independent. Of other churches. Yet dependent on God. The church should not really be under the control of some kind of conference. Or a denomination. Or a fellowship. Really each church should be independent. Of man's control. But dependent on God's leadership. And of course the congregation should love and value its leadership. And esteem them. The government of the church rests entirely with the members of the body. Independent and separate from all other churches. In matters of authority and control. Being answerable only to the Lord Jesus Christ. So there's some different denominational structures. That various churches have got. Reporting lines to other churches. Or hierarchies. Of bishops and archbishops. And dioceses and all that. And archdioceses. And all these kind of manufactured. Hierarchical structures. Which are foreign to what the Bible tells us about. Really the church.

[25 : 19] It should be us. As one body of local believers together. Local believers assembling together. That we would have that heart and that mind to be biblical. And search the will of God. And to seek his will. And to be directed by the Lord. So really the church is a theocracy. Not a democracy. And God helping us will seek the will of God. And we'll have that as a body. And be directed by the spirit of God. Of course there's still good opportunities. We can get together with like-minded churches. As we've got this conference coming up. That we're helping to facilitate. And it's good to get with other like-minded believers. So there's other like-minded churches to ours. We're not against fellowshiping with them. And associating with them. And having their preachers come to us. And our preachers going to them. And such things as that. Because that's a healthy interaction. And we're of the same mind.

[26 : 16] But it's not in a denominational way. That can be where we're reporting to. Or beholden to others. Or sending money to other headquarters. And such things as that. Really it's not really a biblical model. But there is that interaction which is healthy. Like we see for example in the reference there. Colossians 4. Paul says to the Colossians. That this epistle be read. Also in the church of the Laodiceans. And that likewise you read the epistle of Laodicea. So there's a sense where there's a bit of an interchange between these two churches. So that's a good healthy kind of thing. So you see there it's autonomous self-governing. It's indigenous in the sense that it's local. And there's a worldwide vision for the church as well. Another truth is that there is a pastoral authority. In the sense that there is a scriptural order. It tells us there that the pastor is to rule the local church.

[27 : 14] Now by this word rule. It means oversee. Organise. Administrate. Lead by example. Govern. It doesn't mean dominate. It doesn't mean the pastor is over you.

In the sense that you're under his thumb. It tells us that for example in 2 Corinthians 1.24. It says. Not that we have dominion over your faith. So it's not that heavy handed.

Heavy shepherding type of pastoral rule. But more of a coordination. More of an administration. A godly administration. Not a domination. If a man desireth the work of the office of a bishop. He desireth the good work. Now this word bishop. It's not in the sense that the son that are bishops and archbishops. It's not some hierarchy thing. Some people make out they're a bishop. And that's somehow bigger and better than a pastor or something. Bishop and pastor and elder. They're all interchangeable terms. They all mean the same thing essentially. But the word bishop. It means overseer.

[28 : 13] So it's got the sense of an oversight. That they've got a watch over things. And that things are running in a smooth orderly way. That sense of being a bishop is an oversight.

So as it says in the notes there. Titus 1 verses 5 through 7. And it shows that bishop and elder is the same person. 1 Thessalonians 5.12 talks about people over you in the Lord.

So there is a sense of a reporting to one another. People over you in the Lord. But it's not like in a management structure. Not like the pastor is the CEO or something like that.

More that it's a godly relationship. We see Revelation 2. The Lord as John records addresses the angel of the church. Numbers of times.

The different seven churches in Revelation. For example Revelation 2 verse 1. So we would understand the angel meaning the pastor of the church.

[29 : 12] So the word angel doesn't mean I'm an angel or anything. But the word angel means messenger. We could understand that connotation. That the preacher, the pastor is like a messenger.

I'm the messenger boy. Delivering God's message. So that's another picture there too. In the church administration God sends other men to help in leadership.

For example we know Ephesians 4.11 it says. And he gave some apostles. Some prophets. Some evangelists. Some pastors. And teachers. There's different roles there.

And of course we would understand that apostles and prophets in the present time. We would see that role has been fulfilled. They were foundational officers. We do see that there's bishops and deacons as you see there in Philippians 1 verse 1.

So there's different roles, different responsibilities, different officers. So we'd see that there now essentially that there's only really two officers in the church. That of the pastor and the deacon.

[30 : 16] And so there's responsibilities that others can take up. We see as one scriptural example of that. That Moses had others to help him.

In Exodus 18 verses 19 through 27. We see Jethro came to Moses and saw that Moses was overloaded. And he recommended that there be a delegation of responsibilities.

So there's captains of hundreds and fifties and tens. There's people that took different responsibilities. And in Numbers 11 it talks about how there were 70 men under Moses.

Of course there was a huge crowd. There was 2 to 3 million Jews. And so there's lots of needs.

People coming to Moses for different questions. And so there was a delegation to 70 extra men to take that load from Moses.

And it's the same in the early church too. We see in Acts 6 how the apostles called on some men to help serve tables. And we could understand them to be deacons. And they helped to cover some of those needs.

[31 : 27] You could perhaps conjecture that apostles today. We could liken them to missionaries of today. Because the word apostle, apostello, it means to be sending out.

And so in a way missionaries are sent out. We're not saying that they're apostles entirely in the biblical sense of the word. As in the gift of the apostle. As in miracle working and wonders and signs.

But there's a sense where they are apostello. They're sent out. Missionaries are sent out from the local church. We could think of prophets as in preachers who might come and preach. That may not be the elder.

And we see evangelists and teachers. So lots of different responsibilities. And even of course men and women as well can be teachers. Depending on what they are teaching or who they are

teaching.

For example we could consider that women can serve teaching children. There's not a conflict there. Ephesians 4.11 talks about all of those different kinds of things. And all of these different ministries are to work together.

[32 : 28] With the object to edify the saints for the work of the ministry. And really we've all got that. Every believer is part of the work of the ministry. In other words the work of serving God. And again there Titus 2.3-4.

It talks about older women teaching the younger women as well. So there's that proviso. That older women teaching younger women is not unscriptural. That's quite scriptural and commended. Moving on to the role of a bishop. We've got that scripture there 1 Timothy 3. It tells us about the qualifications of a bishop, of an elder. It tells us there if a man desire the office of a bishop he desireth a good work.

A bishop then must be blameless. The husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour. Given to hospitality, apt to teach. Not given to wine, no striker.

Not greedy or filthy lucre but patient. Not a brawler, not covetous. One that ruleth his own house. Having his children in subjection with all gravity. For if a man know not how to rule his own house.

[33 : 30] How shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice. Lest being lifted up with pride he fall into condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without.

Lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. So you see all those qualifications there. Then of course the next one, Titus 1, gives us another list as well. What the bishop must have.

If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God. Not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine.

No striker, not given to filthy lucre. But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, wholly temperate, wholly fast of faithful word. As he had been taught that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

So it tells us there it's an office. The office of the bishop. He's an officer of the church. And really the local pastor is the under-shepherd. Again, Christ is really the ultimate, I like to say Christ is the senior pastor.

[34 : 39] He is the shepherd. He is the head pastor. I'm just an under-shepherd in my own failing way to serve him and to serve you as the shepherd. And it says that the shepherd should not lord it over God's heritage.

So not someone who's bombastic or an overruling kind of style. But ideally that the congregation follows the shepherd as he follows the Lord.

See, a good shepherd, the sheep follow the shepherd. Ideally that the shepherd has got that role that people want to follow him. It's not as in the modern day, as in shepherds these days, they drive the sheep with their sheepdogs.

But in the Middle Eastern picture of it, that the shepherd goes before the sheep. The sheep hear his voice and they follow him. And of course that's the ultimate one that we want to follow is the good shepherd.

We want to follow him. And God helping us will all follow him. So something further on the duties of the pastor. 1 Peter 5. Of course it tells us there, feed the flock of God which is among you.

[35 : 42] It tells how the shepherd, the pastor should feed the sheep, protect the sheep. There's wolves out there. It tells in Acts 20 verses 29 through 31.

1 Peter 5.

Clergy and laity. There's a clergy class and a laity class. That can be an unhealthy kind of style. Of course I am devoted to serving in the role but it's not in an overruling kind of fashion.

It's interesting how, and we've touched on it lately, how the Lord hates the deeds and doctrines of the Nicolaitans. It's not really spelled out what that is but the word Nicolaitan has got the sense of power over people.

So you could conjecture that there's some kind of wrong exertion of power over people in the Nicolaitan system. We don't want that kind of system.

[37 : 01] And then moving on about the office of deacons, we read further qualifications of those that would serve as deacons. It says, It's interesting this word deacon.

And it's got this meaning of waiting on tables, like a table waiter. And it's someone who serves or ministers. The root word means to run errands or to raise dust in a hurry.

So someone who's running around, very actively serving, running errands. And of course every believer really is a deacon. We should all be deaconing in the sense of we should all be serving. Every one of us is a servant of the Lord. And of course our Lord in Mark 9, it says of him, He's the servant of all. And it's the word deacon. So he's the chief deacon as well as the chief pastor. So Christ was the ultimate deaconess. It says in Mark 10, 45, The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. He's come to be a deacon.

[38 : 31] And yet, of course, in the local church, there is the sense where, as we read, there's the office of a deacon, verse 10 there, that there's a sense where there's an office there. There's a certain role that is a designated role.

And of course, a deacon must meet those requirements. There's the requirements of Christian character and example to be a man of proven character and ability and virtue.

So the deacons and caring people in the congregation, they keep the pastors free to focus on the spiritual, the prayer and ministry of the word. Moving on to some of the ordinances of the church, we see baptism.

Baptism. We would understand that scripturally, to be baptism by immersion, the word baptised means to dunk, to immerse. That's the clear meaning of the word. And in baptism, we know it testifies of our faith, that we've died with Christ, that we're buried with him, as the picture shows in the waters, and then risen to new life with him as we come out, a picture of resurrection.

And then, of course, we see the other ordinance of the church, the Lord's Supper. It's an ordinance for believers only, a commemoration of his death and our fellowship with him. We shouldn't enter into it casually.

[39 : 44] We should do it very reverently and examine ourselves as we are exhorted to under the searchlight of the Holy Spirit. So baptism and the Lord's Supper, that's essentially the two ordinances of the church.

The next section talks about the inclusion of the church. So who's included in the church? Really, it's all born-again, baptised believers are welcome to attend and fellowship.

If someone's not baptised, we encourage them and exhort them to be baptised. And the sense we're in the church, the members should be keeping themselves right with God and one another. There should be a unity, a godly fellowship, and the church should be all-inclusive to the rich, the poor, children, adults, married, divorced, single, widows, widowers, all nationalities, all ethnic groups, all skin colours, all languages, etc.

And in Proverbs 22, verse 2, it says the rich and poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them all. So the church really is a family drawn together from all kinds of cultures and countries.

In Colossians 3, verse 11, it says there's neither Greek nor Jew. In Romans 12, verse 5, it says we being many are one body in Christ. Galatians 3, verse 28, says there is neither bond nor free, neither is there male nor female.

[41 : 00] Ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Really, the church should be one big family drawn together as a cosmopolitan group of people from all kinds of ethnic cultures and countries and backgrounds.

And then we see the exclusion of the church. It says that the church is meant to be a meeting place and ministry for believers to edify, to equip each other, then to go out into the world to reach unbelievers.

Strictly speaking, the saints are not told to bring unbelievers in, but to go out to the lost and reach them. Mind you, of course, if an unbeliever wants to come to church, I think it's right that we should encourage them so that they can hear the gospel and hear the good news and trust Christ.

But it's really not the scriptural model to invite people to come to church that then they become Christians. It's more ideally that we go out and reach them and give them the gospel and see them saved. Of course, sometimes we might have an evangelist coming.

I can't see any conflict there with inviting unbelievers to come and hear the gospel preached, of course. But there's a sense where there's a separation from unbelievers. In some churches, it's like there's almost no distinction.

[42 : 08] And even with membership, that they might allow someone to be a member and put their name on the church role who's not even saved. Of course, that's clearly wrong. We need to be sure that somebody is a saved person before they can have their name on the church role.

Otherwise, it's giving them some false assurance that they're a Christian when they're not. And of course, John 17, it tells us that we're not of the world, but we're sent into the world. So we should be separated from unbelievers, from the world, but not isolated from them. Of course, it's not that we're holier than they are. We're not of the world, but we are in the world. And so there's that distinction at times that we want to impact our world. We want to reach our world and be able to draw them to hear about the Saviour, to hear the good news, to get saved. So we're not some separatist bunch that we're excluding people in that unhealthy way. But I suppose there's that exclusion in the sense that you wouldn't want someone to have the impression just because they come to church that they're a Christian or that they can partake of the Lord's table without some kind of exhortation about such things, that they can trust Christ and be saved.

[43 : 18] And just lastly, the discipline of the church. Again, this is something that sometimes can be missing, I know it's been said of some churches that there's really no discipline. That can be a very dangerous thing when there is no discipline. Discipline is needful, but it must be scripturally exercised. Of course, the ultimate discipline is self-discipline, and we're to discipline ourselves, as it talks about there, 1 Corinthians 9, 24. And we're running a race, we want to be like a disciplined athlete on the racetrack. We're to be disciplined by God. Hebrews 12 talks about, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord. He chastens those that he loves. It's a part of God's love that we chasten. And of course, as a father, as a mother, we're the little one that needs correction. There's needful chastening, there's needful chastening, and that's a good thing. And it's important that we discipline our children with loving parental discipline. And it's seen that in the church context, that church discipline is applied to, for example, fornicators.

[44 : 19] In 1 Corinthians 5, there was a situation where a man was openly committing sin, immoral conduct, and that had to be addressed. Paul told the Corinthians to address that. And likewise, there's a sense where heretics, in Titus 3, verse 10, it talks about a man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition reject. We see that some could be disorderly, or divisive. And so, discipline is needful in those contexts. You see some churches where, really, it's anything goes. There's no right or wrong. There's no kind of setting of a standard of righteous conduct. No expectation of that. And the church has lost its purity, and its reverence, and holiness. And it's just become like the world. It's just, there's no substance to it. There's no strength to it, when there's no discipline. As again, I said before, the ultimate goal of discipline, really, is restoration. It talks about, ye that are spiritual, restore such an one, in the spirit of meekness.

[45 : 23] So we know we can all fail, every one of us, myself included. And we've got to have that heart, that we restore people, knowing that we ourselves can be tempted, we ourselves can fail. And to have that heart, when someone does sin, our heart is to restore them. I believe the sense of the word, restore, is like a broken bone, being knitted back together again. It's got the sense of bringing it back, to where it should be. And so when someone sins, who's a brother, a sister, we want to reach out to them, bring needful correction, and discipline, chastening, in a loving, corrective way, with the intention to restore them back to fellowship. That's our heart, to see them brought back into the fellowship, brought back into the fold, and make that necessary repentance, that necessary seeking of forgiveness from the church.