

This We Teach: The Church

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[0 : 00] I want to begin really this morning with an awesome description of the church.

! A description, not a description of a building, okay? Because you know, don't you, that the church is not a building. I mean, you've heard that ever since you were a little kid in Sunday school, and yet sometimes we still kind of equate the church with its location, its building.

And to some extent, doctrinally, that is correct. I mean, we should identify a church by its location because God's work through the church is through the local church.

And so we're a local body of baptized believers. We're a church. But when I say its location, I'm not talking about its building, okay? There are churches meeting in many parts of the world today, underneath a tree somewhere, or, you know, in a tent, or, you know, in an apartment building, or in a factory, as many of the churches in China.

Meet. And so the building doesn't define the church, but, and yet, I still say that the passage we're going to be looking at here in just a moment really is a beautiful description of the church in terms of the people in the church, in terms of you here this morning.

[1 : 37] And it's found in Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 2, verses 19 through 22. So let me read it and emphasize a little bit of it, kind of a little mini-sermon before I teach the lesson or have us walk through our statement of faith on the church.

So here's how Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 19. Now, therefore, you, he's speaking to the church, you are no longer, what?

Foreigners and strangers and foreigners, or aliens, some versions render it. No longer aliens, foreigners, strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints.

Now, that's the first part of the description, and it's very vivid, the image there, of really the image of the kingdom. And so what is he saying? He's saying that the church is made up of foreigners, or who once were foreigners, aliens, who have now become citizens, citizens of God's kingdom.

That's a description of us here this morning. Let me read on this great passage. And what else? Members of the household of God.

[2 : 51] Now, that's a completely different image. Members of the household of God. And so the church is made up of strangers, or those who once were strangers, who have now become family.

Become family members in God's household. Isn't this a beautiful description of the church? He's describing us here this morning. We were aliens, then now we're citizens of God's great kingdom. We were once strangers, but now we're family. Family members of God's household. And what else? Well, having been built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, that's just a description of what we have contained right here in this book, and you have in your copies of God's word.

So founded on the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone, in whom being built up, or the whole building, rather, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Now this is another image, as it describes who we are. Built up, or grows into, a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

[4 : 24] It's a beautiful description. I'd love to take more time and just unpack all of that. But what is he saying? Yet another image. The church is made up of former idolaters, because that's what we were.

Former idolaters, we put everything before Christ. Former idolaters who now have become a holy temple. We've become a holy temple of God's dwelling place, a dwelling place for God.

You see, it's interesting that if you look at it in these terms, in the Old Testament, God had a temple for his people, but in the New Testament, God has a people for his temple.

Beautiful image, the church. And we are the temple of God. So this is a description of the church, of what we are.

An awesome description of the New Testament church, where foreigners have become citizens, and strangers have become family members, and idolaters have now become the temple, the very temple of the living, the one true and living God.

[5 : 33] Not this building, but you, you, every one of you, I hope, if you name the name of Christ. And, of course, all of this made possible through the gospel, and through believing in it, through faith, we could say, in the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And this is amazing. Now, having said that, most people in the world want no part of that. No part of it. Right?

Most people in the world don't care anything about the church, don't want anything about the church. Adrian Rogers used to say, many people go to church just three times in their lives. When they are born, when they are married, and when they die.

Those three times. Hatched, matched, and dispatched. If you can think of it in those terms. The first time, they throw water. The second time, rice.

The third time, dirt. And that's just about all. Most people have any contact or connection with the church. And then there are, of course, those that we might call the CEM church attenders.

[6 : 48] Right? You know who the CEM church attenders are? Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day. And that's the only time they ever come into the church.

If they come at all. But really, more seriously, and more tragic, are those who are professing believers, who still, their commitment to the church is sometimes hit and miss.

Hit or miss. Those that we sometimes call fair weather Christians. We used to call, we sometimes call them fair weather Baptists. And I've known quite a few of those.

Kind of like the young man who called up his girlfriend one time and said, Sweetheart, you are so precious to me. I love you so much. I would fight wild beasts to be at your side.

I would walk barefoot on broken glass just to hold your hand. And tonight, if it doesn't rain, I'm going to come by and see you. That's just, you know, funny, but how true, isn't it?

[7 : 54] True to life. It is when it comes to commitment to the church on the part of many. Sometimes even our commitment. And so it's a sad thing.

But when we really consider what the Bible teaches about the church, I mean, really consider the doctrine of the church, the truth about the church, our love for it, our commitment to it, I think, will be, or should be, dramatically changed.

All right. So, here is what we teach about the church. We teach that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ, all born again believers, are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the church.

Now, that is a statement regarding the kind of universal nature of the church. One united spiritual body, the church.

Comes through salvation. First Corinthians chapter 12, verse 13, for by one spirit we were, what? All baptized. Now, that's not what happens up here.

[9 : 13] That's not water baptism. Spiritual baptism. We were all baptized. And really, the word means immersed. We are all immersed into one body.

One body. One united body. Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, Paul says. And so this is, you know, what the church is.

One body. One body. Of which, of course, Christ is the head. He is the head of the church. And a couple of passages that support that.

Ephesians chapter 1, verse 22. And he put all things under his feet, that is, under the feet of Jesus, and gave him to be head. Head over all things to the church.

Jesus is the head. Colossians chapter 1, verse 18. And he is the head. There's that word again. He's the head. He's top. He's head. In terms of this image of a body, a body has one head.

[10 : 15] And Jesus is the head. The head of the body. The church. Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things, he may have the preeminence.

And does he? In all things. That's a big question, isn't it? This is defining the church. Go on. We teach that the formation of the church, the body of Christ, began on the day of Pentecost.

And you can go to Acts chapter 2, read about the birth of the church according to the way we teach. Now, not everyone agrees with that. I might just throw in there to you. There are some

Bible-believing, Christ-honoring people who believe that the church actually started when Jesus chose his 12 apostles.

So early on, from the very beginning of the New Testament, chose his 12 disciples, and then others were added as disciples. And you have kind of a picture of a body of people who are following Christ.

All of them profess to be believers. All of them profess to be disciples. Some of them are not true disciples. Kind of a picture of the church. There are those who hold that view concerning the birth of the church.

[11:30] There are even those who will go back even further, back into the Old Testament, all the way to Genesis, and find in Scripture the birth of the church there.

It's a little difficult to see that, but I just want you to know there are other views concerning this, and you probably didn't know that. But what do we teach? We teach that the foundation of the church, the body of Christ, began on the day of Pentecost, but it's not completed, is it?

It will be completed at the coming of Christ. That is the second coming of Christ. For his own, that is for his church. Another term would be for his bride.

Another term that is used to describe the church. when Christ, with the coming of Christ, for his own, when? At, according to the way we teach, the rapture.

The rapture of the church. And here are a couple of passages that deal with that. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 51 to 52. Behold, I tell you a mystery, because this has not beforehand been revealed, and this is new.

[12:40] A mystery, we shall not all sleep. That is, physically die. But we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised, incorruptible, and we shall be changed. I think a reference to those who have not died. Those who are alive, and it's coming.

And I say that because of this second passage of Scripture. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 16 through 18, where Paul is talking about the same event. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. I'll just throw in there, that's why some people think Baptists are going to be the first ones to go. The dead in Christ, I just had to throw in that old, old, worn out joke. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we, actually there'll be Baptists included in the we, then we who are alive and remain, alive and remain when?

[13:49] At the second coming, when Christ comes again. We who are alive and remain shall be caught up. Now that's the key word there.

Caught up, it's one word in the Greek text. Caught up together with them, all the rest of them, in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

Now that's a very defining passage of scripture concerning not only the second coming, but what is going to take place when Christ comes. We'll be caught up. The Greek word is harpazo.

Harpazo. And by the way, the word rapture, in case you don't know this, doesn't appear in the New Testament, the Greek New Testament. it's actually from the Latin translation of this word harpazo, rapio, is the word from which we get the word rapture.

But the meaning is what's important here. Harpazo means to seize by force or to snatch away suddenly, even violently.

[14:57] Now, not violent in the sense of it's going to hurt, so don't worry about that when the rapture comes, but it's like that. We're not just going to kind of float on up there.

We'll be caught up out of here, raptured out of here. So one day at Christ's coming, we, the church of Jesus Christ, will be snatched away.

There'll be another way to define it. Snatched away up out of here into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And Paul adds, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

And then he even adds this, therefore comfort one another with these words. Which is a little, one of many reasons why I don't believe that we're going to experience the tribulation.

It'd be awfully hard to comfort one another with these words if the rapture is going to come at the end of the tribulation or somewhere in between there. But here's the idea. When Christ comes, his church is going to be raptured, going to be snatched out of here.

[16:03] Alright, so let's go on with our statement because I'm not here this morning to teach eschatology. Let's go on with our statement on the church. We teach that the church is thus a

unique spiritual organism.

That sounds a little strange like a lesson on biology. No, not like some amoeba or something like that, but organism in the sense that it's living. So it's not this building, it's a living, a spiritual living entity, organism designed by Christ.

He designed it, we didn't, made up of all born again believers in this present age. What is this present age? Well, it's a period of time, an epoch of time that started at the cross and will end at the coming of Christ.

So it's now been going on for a little over 2,000 years. That's this present age. The Bible also uses the term the end times or the last days.

Sometimes the Bible uses that term. Last days began with the cross. The last days and the last days have been continuing now again for over 2,000 years and will come to an end when Christ comes.

[17:21] All right? So the church then, the spiritual organism designed by Christ, put together by Christ, created by Christ, made up of all born again believers, all born again believers in this present age.

Again, that's in the sense of the totality of the church in a universal sense in the whole of the body and it's being built now and will continue until Christ comes.

which means, back to our statement, among other things, that the church is distinct from Israel. Distinct.

It's a distinct thing. It's not the same as Israel. Distinct from Israel, a mystery. Church is a mystery. Not revealed until this age.

This age. Started at the cross, the ends of the coming of Christ. Not revealed until this age. The church is a mystery. It was a mystery in the Old Testament. There are glimpses of the church in the Old Testament, I believe, prophetically.

[18:26] There are illusions to it. There are foreshadowings of it. But the church is a mystery in the Old Testament. When Jesus came and began to teach his disciples, the church was a mystery to them.

In fact, everything that has occurred from the coming of Christ, first coming of Christ, to his second coming, this 2,000 years, there's a huge gap in the Old Testament.

There's nothing in the Old Testament about it. Or very little. It's a mystery. That's the idea, and this is what we teach. The church is a mystery. A mystery not revealed until this age, the age in which we live, the New Testament age.

And that mystery, of course, again, is the church. Basically, that Jews and Gentiles would be brought together by God to form a unique body, unique people of God.

That's the mystery of the Old Testament. I'd love to, again, expand upon this, but we just need to go on. Let's do go on. We teach that the establishment and continuity of local churches, now we're going to get down to the visible part of the church today, the local church.

[19:45] So we teach that the establishment of a local church, church planting and so forth, and the continuity, continuing nature of the local church, is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament scriptures, and that the members of the one spiritual body, that's in the universal sense, are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies.

That's what we are. We're the church, the local assembly of those who have been called out. We are the church, the local body of believers, a local assembly, which today, by the way, is the only visible, now hear me, the only visible representation of the body of Christ that we have today.

we can't see the church universal. It's invisible, made up of true, born-again believers, who are part of local churches just like this one all around the world.

But what we can see today is not necessarily the true church, but a visible representation representation of the body of Christ here today.

And so, the true body of Christ today is invisible. Again, being made up of true believers from all around the world, who will one day, and this is glorious to think about, one day will be gathered together when Christ comes again.

[21:30] And so, I would say to you that any kind of concept of a visible universal church is future. It's future, and will happen when Christ comes.

All right? Now let's go on. And I'll say a few more things about that as we go along with our statement. We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ.

All right? Of course. We've already said that, haven't we, when we said that Christ is the head of the church. And so, as our statement says, church leadership gifts, that would be gifts holy, spiritual gifts used in the church.

Order, that would be a reference to how we govern ourselves as a church, do business and so forth, as well as kind of our order of the way we do everything.

Discipline, which would include discipleship as well as the disciplining of members, sinning members in the church, and worship, everything about our worship, how we worship, our theology of worship, the substance of our worship, practice of our worship, all of this, they're appointed through His sovereignty, God's sovereignty, as found in the scriptures.

[23 : 01] So, in short, everything we do as a church, from the way we govern ourselves, the way we make decisions, the way we choose leadership, how we follow leadership, how leaders are to lead in the church, all of our discipleship, and disciplining of the body, all of our worship, all of it is to be found and guided by this book, by the Bible.

All right, let's go on. The biblically designated officers officers serving under Christ, because remember, Christ is the head, and so I'm not the head, I am under His headship.

Under Christ, these two biblically designated officers are elders, elders, also called overseers in scripture, we'll see an example of that here in just a moment, also called bishops, or from the word episkopos, bishops, pastors, we'll see that word also in scripture, pastors slash teachers, all right, so elders, and then the second one, of course, deacons.

We already know all this, don't we? Elders and deacons, both of whom must meet the biblical qualifications, and where do we find those qualifications?

Well, 1 Timothy chapter 3, Titus chapter 1, in fact, if you'll come on Wednesday nights, we're getting ready to study those qualifications in Titus.

[24 : 46] All right, so what do we teach concerning these two offices in the church? Well, we teach that the elders lead or rule, in a sense of rule, or overseeing as servants of Christ, as servants of Christ, and have his authority in directing the church.

Now, let's look at this passage, 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 1 through 4. The elders, and by the way, I mentioned that the Bible uses several words to describe this one office of elder.

There's the word elder, there's the word shepherd, we're going to see here in this passage. There's the word overseer, and so they're all right here in this passage.

The elders, that's presbyteros, from which we get our word presbyter, or some denominations use that term more literally than we do.

Presbyterian comes from this word. So, the elders, he's speaking to the elders who are among you, I exhort, and then he says, here's the exhortation, shepherd, poimen, poimen, that's pastor, pastor, there's another word for this, again, this one office in the church.

[26 : 09] Shepherd, or pastor, the flock of God which is among you, serving as, and here's this word, overseers, episkopos, that's the other word.

And all these words, various words are describing one office in the church, really helping us to describe the three different aspects of the ministry of the elder in the church.

Episcopos, overseers, and then it goes on, not by compulsion, but willingly. Not by dishonest gain, but eagerly.

I tell you, there are a lot of charlatan pastors and church leaders today who need to go to that passage and be convicted in their hearts, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly.

Not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And then I love this part of it, when the chief shepherd, that's the head shepherd, you know, I'm an under shepherd.

[27 : 14] When the chief shepherd, that's Jesus, when he comes, when he shall appear, you will receive, he's speaking to elders, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. That is, elders who lead, oversee, pastor in the way that scripture prescribes.

All right? Now, with that said, then, the congregation is to submit to their leadership. I know we don't like that word, submit.

Do we? No. We're kind of, it's just born into us, really, because of our sin nature, but we're even conditioned in our culture not to like that word, submission, but, according to the teachings of scripture, the congregation is to submit to their leadership, and at the same time, and this is important, especially to all you who are serving as elders in this church, and even those who might potentially one day be an elder, elders are accountable to the congregation.

We serve at your pleasure. I mean, we're taking nominations for elders right now and all throughout this month. No one becomes an elder of this church unless the congregation nominates them and elects them.

And even the duties of elders and responsibilities of elders, and to some extent, unilateral authority is something that's granted by the congregation, by the congregation.

[28 : 46] So elders are accountable to the congregation. Now, what about the office of deacon? Well, we teach that deacons lead in the service ministries of the church.

By the way, deacon, the very word deacon in our English text comes right from the Greek, diakonos, and it just kind of comes over into the text.

And the very word diakonos means servant, not ruler, not overseer, as the words episkopos and presbyteros, in terms of elders, means.

But deacons are diakonos, they're servants of the church, so they lead, then, in the service ministries of the church, particularly focused on the meeting of the physical needs of the body of Christ, and that's what our deacons do.

And, of course, we could go to Acts chapter 6, verses 1 through 6, and we're not going to. I could teach a little lesson on the birth of deacons, how deacons came about within the church according to the sovereignty of God, but in response to the need of the church, and you remember from that passage how many in the church were not being fed, they were coming short of some of their physical needs, and the apostles were trying to meet all those needs of service in the church, and they couldn't physically do it, and if they continued to do it, it would take away from their primary responsibility, and that is prayer and the ministry of the word, and so God directed the church to form deacons to take care of these service ministries within the church, Acts chapter 6.

[30 : 32] All right, let's go on. We teach the mutual accountability of all believers to each other. Now, this is a really hard concept for us in our day, and it's kind of contrary to our culture.

We don't, as Americans really, we don't like to be mutually accountable to one another. We kind of like our own private little lives, you know, and we, you know, it's very American to say to be against anybody sticking their nose into my business, you know, but as the church, we're to be mutually accountable.

We are, and for our greater good, if we could just see the benefit of that, as well as the need for discipline, discipline of sending members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture.

Now, this is talking about church discipline, something that is also quite strange and almost totally non-existent in many Baptist churches and many churches in our country.

Church discipline is very, very, very important. So important that I have, as I promised a long time ago, I'm going to bring a message specifically on scriptural church discipline, and we're going to look at the teachings of Jesus on the subject, although bringing in other passages in the Bible that deal with that subject, but primarily Jesus' teachings out of Matthew chapter 18.

[32 : 15] I would say this this morning, what exactly is the ultimate desired goal of church discipline? What is it that we want out of church discipline?

Well, let's look at this passage in Galatians, Galatians chapter 6, verses 1 and 2. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore them, restore him or her.

That requires this kind of mutual relationship that we have with one another. So where does it begin? Church discipline begins when there's a sinning brother or sister in the church and there is a spiritual brother or sister in the church that sees that sin, knows that sin, and that spiritual one goes to the sinning brother.

That's where church discipline begins. And then, of course, as we look at Matthew 18, we'll see a whole process, kind of a step-by-step process that Jesus gives us.

All right, so you who are spiritual should restore him. There's the ultimate goal, isn't it? The desire of church discipline. It's not to exclude, not to expel, not to boot them out of the church, not to criticize, you know, or anything like that.

[33 : 41] It is to restore him or her. In what kind of a spirit? Spirit of gentleness. Gentleness.

Why? Because we're all sinners. keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens. In this context, it's the burden of sin, guilt, of going astray or making wrong choices or disobeying God's word.

So we're to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. So that very, very clearly defines the goal, the desire of any form of church discipline. That is not exclusion, but restoration. Restoration. Not just restoration to the fellowship of the body, but more importantly, fellowship, restored fellowship with God, with the Lord Jesus Christ. All right, let's go on with our statement. We teach the autonomy of the local church. autonomy. [34 : 52] What does that mean? Self-rule, basically. That the church governs itself, of course, under the headship of Christ.

I mean, that's implied there in the teaching of the word of God. So we teach the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control.

Let me just go on with it and then I'll come back and explain some of this. Free from any external authority or control, with the right of self-government, and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organization.

That's a mouthful, isn't it? What does that mean? Well, it simply means that as a church body, and I'm talking about the local church, that's what we are.

As a church body, this body, we insist on autonomy from any secular and religious authorities outside religious authorities.

[36 : 06] That's what we believe about the local church. So be it our own federal government, add to that state and local government, autonomous from them, or any agency now existing or ever will be formed, any agency of our government, we're autonomous from them.

We insist upon that. Matthew 21, 22, Jesus said, render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. The church is God's.

Belongs to the Lord. We are his church, his body. And, of course, this would also include any global governing body, such as the United Nations.

United Nations cannot make any kind of law law that would govern our local church. Now, they might do that, try that, but we don't have to submit to that, be it the United Nations, or I would even add any world court or judge.

Do you understand the importance of autonomy? autonomy? We insist upon autonomy from any outside government or agency or entity like that.

[37 : 44] but also, adding to that, any religious organization or denomination or council of churches or whatever.

We're autonomous. Now, what are we as Highland Park Baptist Church? We are cooperating Southern Baptist Church, aren't we? Part of the SBC, that's a denomination, right?

So, we're cooperating Southern Baptist Church, but the SBC, and I'm not being mean about this, I'm just, this is just what we believe the Bible teaches.

The SBC cannot rule over any matter of doctrine or practice in the local church, in our church. We're in fellowship with all the other churches that are, that that, that, that, uh, call themselves Southern Baptists.

We're in fellowship with them and cooperate in many ways with them, but we are autonomous. That's very, very important, uh, for us to understand that. And, historically, Southern Baptist Convention has been very strong on that issue.

[38 : 59] Even strong in places where we wish they wouldn't be, you know, you know, some churches that, uh, Baptist Church might ordain a homosexual as pastor.

You know, they have that right. Now, they don't have a right to continue to be in fellowship with Southern Baptists, but the SBC can't say, no, you can't do that.

They can't say that because the church is autonomous, you see. Now, the biblical basis for this comes primarily from kind of many passages, most of them in Acts, some of them in the Gospels, but passages that describe the local church can give us a description of it.

I mean, we find the church establishing their own doctrines, we find the church choosing their own leaders, we find the church disciplining their own members, we find the church forming their own government, the way they do business and so forth, and it's the model of Scripture, the autonomy of the local church.

All right, now that said, we teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other, and I've already said a little something about that.

[40 : 13] I think it's scriptural for us to cooperate, you find that in the New Testament, where churches cooperate, one good example is cooperate in the collecting of an offering for the churches

in Asia Minor that were very poor and very needy.

All right, so it's scriptural to cooperate with each other for what? Primarily the presentation, propagation of the faith or of the gospel.

That's what the SBC is. Southern Baptist Convention is a fellowship of cooperating Southern Baptist churches or Baptist churches for purposes of presentation, presenting and propagating the faith around the world, planting churches, sending out missionaries and so forth, and supporting those missionaries.

So we cooperate together, and it's very scriptural to do that. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation, application of scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation, cooperation with other churches.

So if, you know, I have a member coming to me and saying, you know, the Catholic churches over here, they really are getting into evangelism, and I think we ought to join with them and be a part of their evangelistic efforts here in Bartlesville.

[41 : 40] Well, we're not going to do that. All right? And we're going to base that upon scripture. All right? So the elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government as well, with, of course, as we've already said, the accountability to the church, to the church.

All right? So that's all pretty straightforward. Let's move on. We teach that the purpose of the church is to glorify God. That's the purpose of the church.

That's the purpose of your life as a believer, to glorify God, to bring glory to God. And how do we do that? Well, we've listed a few things here.

By building itself, building the church up in the faith. That's discipleship, maturing in the faith. That's what we're to be about.

That's how we glorify God. By instruction of the word, of course. By fellowship. By keeping the ordinances that have been given to us.

[42 : 48] We'll get to the ordinances here in just a minute. it. And by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world.

That's how we bring glory to God. We also teach the importance of discipleship. Maturing one another in the faith. And we teach the calling of all saints.

I won't pay attention to this. Calling of all saints. That's each and every one of us. A saint. That's what you are. All right. He said, well, I've never considered myself a saint.

Well, if you are separated by God from sin and unto himself, if you're saved, you're a saint. All right. So, this is what we teach. God is calling all saints, every one of us here, to the work of service in the church.

To be involved. To serve. To give of yourself. Your time. To serve in some capacity in the church. I ran across this several years ago, and it really is sadly comical, but listen to this.

[43 : 58] You may have heard this before. This is a story about four people in the church whose names were everybody, somebody, anybody, and nobody.

Have you heard this before? The church had financial obligations, and everybody was asked to help. Everybody was sure that somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but do you know who did it? Nobody. You're catching on. It ended up that everybody blamed somebody when nobody did what anybody could have done.

The fact is, whenever work was to be done, nobody could always be counted on. Nobody visited the sick. Nobody gave liberally to the church. Nobody shared the faith. In short, nobody was a very faithful member.

Finally, the day came when somebody left the church and took anybody and everybody with him, and guess who was left? Nobody. Nobody, of course. Well, let's move on from there.

[45 : 02] We teach the responsibility of the church to align with God. We could use the word join with God as he accomplishes his purpose in the world.

It's God's purpose as he accomplishes his purpose, but he wants us to align with him, to join with him in that. To that end, he gives the church spiritual gifts.

To whom? Well, first of all, men chosen by God for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of service and ministry, and they are gifted accordingly to enable that work.

All right? That's the first part of this. That would include me, the elders of our church, deacons of our church. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11.

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets. Those two gifts to the church have already passed, by the way. Some evangelists, I believe that would describe modern day missionaries today.

[46 : 16] And some pastors and teachers, and it's this last group that we're talking about here, pastors slash teachers pastors to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

Some of you might have a King James, and if you look at your King James, there's a comma after saints, to equip the saints, comma, for the work of the ministry, the thought being that it is the pastor's job to do the work of the ministry.

Well, it is my job to do it. It's yours too. But the job that God is talking about here is my job to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. for the building up of the body of Christ.

He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities or gifts to how many?

Each member, every member of the body of Christ. Did you know that you have a spiritual gift? You do. You're probably thinking, well, I wish somebody tell me what it is.

[47 : 22] Well, you can discover it. I might, and others in the church might, be used of God to help confirm what your spiritual gift is, but you need to find it for yourself.

But we all have been given spiritual gifts, spiritual abilities in the church. Romans chapter 12, verse 6 makes that very clear. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.

Okay? Find out, so you need to find out what it is, but when you find out what it is, use it. Use it in the church. 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7.

But the manifestation of the Spirit, it's in the subject of gifts, spiritual gifts, the manifestation, this manifestation, this gifting of the Spirit is given to each one.

For what? The profit of all. The well-being of all. The benefit of all. You see? You don't, by the way, use your spiritual gift to bring glory to yourself to benefit you.

[48 : 29] You give it to benefit all. But now, a distinction needs to be made, and our statement makes that distinction, I think, pretty well. We teach that there were two kinds of gifts given to the early church.

Number one, miraculous gifts of divine revelation and healing given. Watch every word of this, okay?

You may not agree with it, but it's what we teach. divine revelation and healing, these are miraculous gifts, given temporarily in the apostolic era, which is past, by the way, for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles' message.

If I would change that, I would say the authenticity of the apostles and their message. Hebrews chapter 2, verse 4, and the subject here is that message, the revelation of God and those who have been chosen to be the revealers of it, the prophets, the apostles, the Lord Jesus himself and the apostles.

So this is the subject, and so Hebrews says, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will.

[49 : 56] So what is the passage saying? That these gifts, these signs and wonders and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, miraculous manifestations, were given at that time to confirm the authenticity of the messenger and more importantly, the message itself.

Second, ministering gifts. So there are miraculous gifts, and I believe that has passed, all right?

But also ministering gifts, which are given to who? Every one of us. Every one of us, ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another, building up one another.

And that's what we saw there in 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 7, for the prophet of all. So miraculous gifts, ministering gifts. Now, with the New Testament, revelation now complete.

Scripture. And I would say, well, I say Scripture alone, but that's what the statement says. Scripture becomes the soul test of the authenticity of a man's message.

[51 : 18] So check me out, okay, when I preach. That's basically the idea here. You know, the fact that some preachers over the years have been tremendous orators, gifted communicators.

And they are able to communicate in such a way that we hang on every word that they say. That in itself does not authenticate their message. What authenticates their message?

The Scripture. So no matter how persuasive and charismatic the preacher may be, check them out with what the Bible says. All important, okay?

So Scripture becomes a soul test of the authenticity of a man's message. And confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message.

And why is that? Because what is the soul test? The Scripture. God used miraculous signs and wonders and manifestations of the Holy Spirit to confirm his preachers and their messages until he could get his word completed.

[52 : 42] Now the Scripture is the soul test. Very important. Okay? Why is it so important? Well, miraculous gifts can be counterfeited by Satan.

And often are. Often are. So as to deceive even believers. And so the only gifts in operation today are ministry gifts.

Given for edification. That is given for the building up of the body of Christ. All right? So we teach that no one, no one possesses the gift of healing today.

No one does. And if they really did, and if you have met someone who claims to have the gift of healing, then invite them to go with you over to Jane Phillips.

Go in every room. And heal all the sick and lame. No one has been given the gift of healing today. No one.

[54 : 03] Does that mean that there is no more healing? Certainly not. God's still in the healing business. God does hear and answer the prayer of faith.

God does hear and answer. I think it's right to ask Him to heal. Does He always heal? No. Is it because you just don't have enough faith that He doesn't heal?

No, it's not based upon that either. What a terrible burden to place upon anybody. That we just didn't pray right, or pray hard enough, or long enough, or have enough faith. Because He will answer in accordance with His own perfect will.

God will do that according to His own perfect will. For the sick, for the suffering, for the afflicted.

God does that, but He doesn't always heal. God can heal, does heal, doesn't always heal, doesn't have to always heal.

It's according to His own perfect will. God will do that. Now, you know, again, on this point, I'm well aware that there are some who would disagree with this. Not just on the matter of healing, but manifestation of certain miraculous gifts and such.

[55 : 25] And some don't agree with it. And, you know, I discussed this issue when we looked at our statement on God, the Holy Spirit. And so, rather than go back over that again, I just invite you to get on the website and pull up the message on that statement, on the Holy Spirit.

And you can read how I treated that. Okay? All right, let's move on in our statement. And now to the ordinances. We teach that two ordinances, just two, have been committed to the local church.

What are they? Well, they're right there, aren't they? Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Those are the two ordinances, the only two ordinances given to the church. Baptism, Christian baptism, by immersion.

And you say, well, it doesn't really matter, does it? Well, yes, it does. Especially when you consider, as we shall consider in a minute, what the baptism pictures. But let's just take the word baptism, which, again, like diakonos, deacon, is just a word that comes straight from the Greek text.

Baptizo. Baptizo. And every word has a definition, okay? Definitions, of course, for words do change because language is a living thing, but baptism or baptizo back in the days when Paul wrote and the scripture was written, baptizo meant immersion.

[57 : 01] Okay? So if we wanted to translate the word and not just bring the word over into the Greek, we would use the word immerse. Immerse, immersion. Plunging underneath.

That's the meaning of the word. Baptists didn't invent that. We just believe in the correct interpretation of it. And so, therefore, not only the interpretation of the word, but also the picture, what it pictures, what baptism represents.

So, by immersion is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his or her faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior.

That's the beautiful testimony of it. The picture of it. Death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and his union with him in death to sin and resurrection to new life.

You see the picture. You see it very vividly when someone is baptized. How this is pictured. The death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ. The dying to sin and being raised to new life.

[58 : 21] And the picture of baptism is represented in Romans 6, 4, even though water baptism is not the subject, it does give us the picture of the water baptism.

In Romans 6, verse 4, therefore, we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

That's what baptism pictures. It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ.

That's the local church. So it's also a sign with your identifying with us as a member of our church. Acts chapter 2, verses 41 to 42. Then those who gladly received his word, that is the gospel, were baptized.

They believed in the gospel, believed in Christ, they were baptized, and that day about 3,000 souls were what? Added to them. Added to them.

[59 : 29] To what? The church. And they continued steadfastly because that's what you should do after you're baptized and united with the church, to continue steadfastly in the preaching of the word, the apostles' doctrine, and the fellowship with the saints, particularly in the breaking of bread and in prayer.

And what about the Lord's Supper? We teach the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation. That means commemoration, it's a memorial.

And the proclamation of Christ's death until he returns. We keep on doing it until Jesus comes. 1 Corinthians 11, 26. For as oft as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes.

And the Lord's Supper should always be preceded by solemn self-examination. And this is important.

We also teach that whereas the elements of communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, they don't become the flesh and blood of Christ, okay, as some believe.

[60 : 46] Catholics, Lutherans, but they're just simply, the elements are simply representative of of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

So participation in the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ. So just because the elements are, you know, they just represent Christ does not mean that Christ is not here.

And in our taking of the Lord's Supper, we are in actual communion with the risen Christ. In fact, I think that's what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 11, 29 when he talks about the Corinthian church not discerning the body of Christ.

So when we come together for the Lord's Supper and we commune, we commune with Jesus Christ, we're discerning the body of Christ, even though the elements are not actually the body and blood of Jesus.

let's go on. Christ indwells every believer and so is present fellowshiping with his people.

[62 : 02] That's what's happening when we observe the Lord's Supper. You know, Christ indwells every believer and he's present and he's fellowshiping with us. I love this passage in 1 Corinthians 10, 16.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we drink, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

So it's fellowship, it's communion. Alright, so there you have our doctrine of statement on the church. Let me just close by asking you a simple question.

What is your statement of the church? I'm talking about your, kind of your personal statement on the doctrine of the church.

I'm talking about a statement made by your life that the world can see. ever thought of it in those terms? You know, this is more than just head knowledge.

[63 : 11] What is your statement to the world about your church? Huh? What does the world know? I mean, that part of the world that your life intersects with. What do they know about the church based upon your life?

Something to consider. Then I would ask another question. Do you realize how important the church is? Do you?

I'm not talking about how important this building is. How important it is for you to assemble with God's people every Sunday where possible.

And other times when the church assembles together. How important it is to you for your well-being? Your spiritual health?

Do you realize how important that is? I heard about a certain pastor, and I'll close with this this morning. A certain pastor who decided to go visit one of his members, a member that hadn't been to church in several weeks.

[64 : 25] He was concerned about him. So he went by to visit with him. And so he got to the door, knocked on the door, the man opened the door and invited the pastor in, and they went into his living room and sat down, and it was a winter day, cold day, and so the man had a roaring fire going there in his fireplace.

And so the pastor sat down, the man sat down, and the pastor just sat there, didn't say a word. He just stared at the fire. And that went on for quite a while, both of them.

The pastor and this man, who was a member of his church, sat there staring at the fire, you know how kind of mesmerizing a fire can be. That went on for quite a while, the pastor hadn't said a single word yet.

And then finally the pastor got up from his seat and went over to the fire and grabbed the tongs there, and selected out one fairly large ember in the fire and set it off to the side all by itself. And then he went back and sat down. Didn't say a thing. The two of them just looked at the fire and particularly that one ember. Pretty soon, of course, you know, where it was red hot, began to cool off.

[65 : 47] Got cooler and cooler until finally it was just black sitting there by the fire. man got the idea.

He said, I understand. So the pastor, still not a word, got up and headed to the door and his member said, thanks pastor for the fiery sermon.

I'll be there next Sunday. Thank you.