

An Introduction to the Church

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We continue in our series that I've titled loosely "A Beginning Toolbox for Christian Living." A beginning toolbox for Christian living. Now this isn't designed to be a comprehensive series about everything that's important to living the Christian life but just highlighting some particular doctrines that are especially crucial at Truth Community Church. For those of you that are a regular part of our church, we're going to have a fundamentals of the faith class starting on Sundays where more particular details will be laid out for your benefit and for your interaction, this series is more limited in scope by design and what we've done is we have covered in a few messages the doctrine of regeneration, the doctrine of the new birth. Jesus said that you must be born again if you're to enter the kingdom of heaven, so that's a pretty important doctrine. We've dealt with that. We dealt with the doctrine of providence, the idea that God rules over all the details in the universe which means that you have exactly the life that God has given you at this point in time, and we've covered that in detail, it would be not wise for me to try to review that any more than that. But after some time away, tonight and for the next Tuesday and couple of Sundays, we come to the doctrine of the church, and it might be surprising to some in these days of an individualistic approach to Christian living, to think that anyone would have the perspective to put the doctrine of the church in a beginning toolbox for Christian living. I mean, church membership and church attendance is on the decline everywhere and churches have a way of diminishing the importance of their own existence, what we want to do is we want to come to Scripture today and deal with this from a biblical perspective and see it from not the perspective of the utilitarian perspective of our day and age, even in the evangelical church, what's in it for me, what can the church do for me, and doesn't take too long before I start to gag on that mindset, to be honest with you. We want to do something different tonight, we want to look at it from the Bible's perspective which is another way of saying we want to look at this from the perspective of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. What does the Lord Jesus think about the church and the place of the church and the role of the church. So tonight what we have is an introduction to the church. I'm admittedly going to say several things that I have said in the past, but this is part of the process that we're coming to embrace more and more is that we need to stir each other up by way of reminder. That's a very biblical thing to do, and so that's what we're going to do tonight, next week, and following through to the following Sunday on October 20th at which time we'll be having a church membership class after the Sunday service.

Now so let's just dive right in, shall we? People who are saved, those who are saved become a part of the church. I'm going to define terms as we go through here. This is just by way of introduction to the introduction. Those who are saved become a part of the church, the body of Christ, and the church just to give you a little bit of a working definition as we use it here today, the church is that group of people called by God and born of the Spirit who are true believers in Jesus Christ. The church is that group of people called by God and born of the Spirit who are true believers in Jesus Christ.

Now right from the beginning you see that there is a distinction about that definition from the way that the word "church" is used in modern parlance, in modern speech. We're used to thinking, aren't we, when we think of a church, we tend to think of bricks and mortar and of a church building and things like that, and there's the church on Main and First Street that stands out in the town, or whatever. That is not a biblical view of the church. That's not the Bible's usage of the church. That might be a building where the church meets but that is distinct from the church. The church is a gathering or more specifically the church are the people who have been regenerated by the Spirit and brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and so the church is about people, not about a building or a structure of some kind.

So as we're thinking about the prospect of church membership down the road a couple three weeks from now, and for those of you that are already members of Truth Community Church, we're going to review some basics here. Before you join a church, any church, you need to have a definition of what the church is and what is it that marks a true church according to the Bible, and we have I think four points for this evening that I will probably get through rather quickly here tonight. But this first point in my judgment is the most important one of them all. This first point is the one that sets the cornerstone for everything else that follows and it's so much different than what normally people are processing in their minds when they're looking for a church to attend or to become a part of. People come and they want to know immediately what kind of programs are at the church or, you know, when are the service times, are the service times convenient for me and my family or whatever the case may be; people approaching the church with this sense of self-centeredness and, "What does it have to offer me?" On one level I can understand that mindset but we need to grow beyond it and we need to have something else in mind that changes fundamentally our entire perspective about it all.

What is that first point of perspective? What is the true starting point in right thinking about the church? Point 1: the church belongs to Jesus Christ. The church belongs to Jesus Christ. There is an aspect of the church that transcends you and me. The reality of the church was present before you were born, it will be present after you die and go to heaven or go to hell depending on your position with Christ may be. This is a transcendent reality that puts us fundamentally in a different position. We need to see who is at the center of the church, what is the church about, and the church belongs to Christ. That is essential to understand.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, speaking to his disciples he said, "I will build My church." He uses the first singular possessive pronoun. "I am going to build My church." There is

a certain power, a certain sobriety into that to realize that the church throughout the ages belongs to Christ. The church is his. Christ directs the church. Christ owns the church. And that means fundamentally – oh, there are just so many implications just to that but let's start from the outside and work our way in, shall we? The fact that the church belongs to Christ means something really fundamental. It means that the world has no say in the matter whatsoever. It is not the function of the world to tell the church what to do. It is not for unbelievers to dictate what a church should be like. It is not their realm. It is not their prerogative. They don't have an ownership interest in it. The role of unbelievers in respect to the church is to recognize the saving work of Jesus Christ and the fullness of the Godhead of his person and come to him for salvation. That's the only role. That's the only input that the unbeliever has otherwise those who are separate and apart from Christ need to understand that it is not their prerogative to tell the church what to do. It is not for unbelievers to dictate that the church should have social programs, or the church should do this or that. They have no right to that any more than some stranger off the street would have the prerogative to come to you and tell you how you ought to decorate your house, right? You say, "Wwwait a minute! By what right do you speak into that which is mine? Who are you to tell me how to arrange my home? You're not part of the family. You don't own this. You don't pay the taxes. You're completely out of bounds trying to tell me what to do with my house." Well, multiply that by infinity and you start to have a perspective on the unique possessive right that Jesus Christ has in the church.

Now it could be no other way because Jesus Christ, Scripture tells us, is the head of the church. Turn to Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 20. Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 20, Paul is praying for his readers, asking that God would enlighten their eyes that they might understand the glory of having been called to faith in Christ, to understand, verse 19, "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These," it says at the end of verse 19, "are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." That's that transcendent nature of the church that I was talking about, the transcendent nature of Christ. In verse 22 it says, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

Beloved, Jesus Christ is the head over the church, he is the authority, and as its head, Jesus Christ owns the church which is to say Jesus Christ owns his people by right of redemption. He bought us with his precious blood. It is by his saving person, his saving work both in his redemptive life and in his redemptive death and his resurrection and his ascension, in all of the greatness of what he has done and who he is and where he is stationed at the right hand of the heavenly Father, he owns the church. It belongs to him and that means he owns his people and he has the right to do with them as he sees fit.

You don't need to turn there but in Titus 2:14 it says this, it says that Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Now beloved, step back for a moment

and just contemplate the magnificence of this reality that as we sing in hymns, he left his throne above, he came to earth, he did this work in order to save a people for himself. The majesty of what we are contemplating here is beyond our ability to fathom. We cannot understand the fullness of all that this means. Jesus Christ left heaven, came to earth, did a work designed to save and rescue a people that he would own and direct and they would be his possession, zealous to love and serve him in all of their being.

Now with that said, is it not obvious that by the price that was paid for our salvation, that Jesus Christ owns the church, it belongs to him? That's extremely fundamental. To not understand that is to go wrong from the very beginning and to have no way of finding your way back and so here we are gathered together as the people of God on a Tuesday evening, we're gathered together as the people of God who have put our faith in Christ. We realize for some of you, you're still maybe too young to understand that, some of you have not yet repented, you're still on the outside with your nose pressed against the window looking in on the spiritual reality of things, but for those of us that have been redeemed, we understand that we are under the saving work of Christ, we're under his saving intentions for us, and we are under his headship, his Lordship as we gather together and as we live together as the people of God within this local assembly. The church belongs to Jesus Christ.

Now that is just very brief but that is very fundamental. Now side-by-side with that, or the other side of the coin of that, you might say, comes to point 2 and it's this: that the church consists of true believers. When I say true believers, I mean people who have been born again; who have been truly saved; who have been truly converted; those who are true Christians, who are truly regenerate in terms of this toolbox for Christian living that we have been describing. And here's the thing that I would have you to start with, I guess, is that all true believers belong to the church with a capital "C." Church with a capital "C," the Church of Christ with a capital "C." This is sometimes called the universal church. They are actually united with Christ and if you'll look at 1 Corinthians 12 with me, 1 Corinthians 12:13, we see an indication of this universal reality. 1 Corinthians 12:13, it says that "by one Spirit," do you see the work, the role of the Holy Spirit again in this in the church? "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." Jews who have faith in Christ, Gentiles who have faith in Christ, whether they were slaves, whether they were freemen, all who are gathered up in Christ belong to the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit has taken us and brought us into union with Jesus Christ and in that sense we belong to the true church, the universal Church which is every true believer in Christ who has truly been born again.

So God brings his people to Christ by the work of regeneration. The Spirit does a work and baptizes us into the spiritual body of Christ and that is true of every believer. The church consists of true believers and only of true believers. In this sense, there are no unbelievers in the true Church of Christ, the capital "C" church of Christ. There are no unbelievers there. It is only those that have truly been born again and have put their personal faith and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the word "church" has another usage in Scripture which I like to call church with a small "c," church with a small "c" can refer to local assemblies of believers so that we see in the New Testament a reference to the churches of Galatia, that region in modern-day Turkey, Galatians 1:2, or the church of the Thessalonians, that church that was in the city of Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians 1:1. As you compare these usages of the word "church" in Scripture, you see that there's a broad usage referring to the universal Church and then it's used to refer to local assemblies in a way that doesn't fit that first initial capital "C" usage of the church. And so what this means, beloved, is that as you put these things together, there is the universal Church consisting of all believers, and then there is a manifestation of believers in a local assembly, in a locality that gather together in order to live the Christian life together. This is what we would call the local church. Truth Community Church is a local church. It's not the universal Church. We are a local assembly of believers and what the tenor of the New Testament is, and we just start to build on these things here, we're putting up the framework for more things that we want to say in the coming days from our pulpit, but what this says and what this should be a great encouragement for those of you that are with us here this evening is this, is that true Christians are designed to gather together. They are meant to be a part of a local body where different things happen that we're going to see more particularly next Tuesday and the reasons that we gather and the reason that the church exists. But Christians are to gather together, are to be a part of a local assembly and Scripture doesn't know anything of a Christian that is separate and apart and a Lone Ranger kind of person who truly belongs to Christ. It's just not like that.

Charles Spurgeon said, and I quote, he said, "I believe that every Christian ought to be joined to some visible church. That is his plain duty according to the Scriptures." And in language that only Spurgeon could do in classic Spurgeon language, he says this, he goes on to say, "God's people are not dogs that they might go about one-by-one. They are sheep and therefore they should be in flocks."

So this is the way that we are to think about the nature of being a Christian and the nature of the local church. Christ owns the church because he bought it with his own precious blood. Individually he has bought us with his blood and the purpose of Christ, because he bought the whole church, it's obvious that he intends for individual members that he has saved to be part of the broader body that he died to save, and the fact that you're gathered together and have a regular part in the life of Truth Community Church is a good barometer of your spiritual health if you are professing faith in Christ. I'm very thankful to God for that and for you.

Now I should say one other thing as churches depart more and more from biblical teaching, we realize that it leaves spiritual orphans in a way that makes things very difficult and so we have a great sense of compassion for those that are trying to find their way being faithful to Christ when there is not much there. And if I can say one other thing about this, is just to recognize and for you to understand that when a church and when churches in a given locality just drift and drift from Scripture, it has harmful consequences for those who truly belong to Christ and they are left and they're wandering as though they were sheep without a shepherd and it's very difficult for them, and to

whatever extent that we can minister to them through what we do, we consider it a privilege to do so.

So with that said and not addressing that nearly sufficiently at all, we've said that the church belongs to Christ and that the church consists of true believers. Well, let's go to point 3 here for this evening and answer this question. Let me give you the point and then I'll ask the question. Point 3 is that the church has spiritual leaders. The church has spiritual leaders and part of the antipathy, the opposition that people have to the church, can at times come to a wrong view of spiritual authority. The question is this, the question is this. We're here on earth, the church is gathering here on this sphere, and Christ is in heaven, he's physically in heaven, he ascended up bodily into heaven, and so the question is: how does Christ lead his church when he himself is not physically present with us? That had to be a difficult question for the disciples immediately after the ascension. They had known Christ in the course of the years of his earthly ministry, he was right there with them and now he's gone. Now Christ provided for that. He told them, "I said I'll send another Helper. I'll send the Holy Spirit to help you." But how does he lead his church when he is not physically here? The biblical instruction, the biblical answer to that is that he raises up men to be spiritual leaders in the midst of a local body.

Look at Acts 20 with me. Acts 20, beginning in verse 28, and actually focusing on verse 28. Acts 20:28 and you'll see again as so often happens, that the overall things that we're teaching come up in different places reinforcing what we are saying. In Acts 20:28 it says, "Be on guard for yourselves," this is Paul speaking to the elders at the church of Ephesus. He says, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Now let's start at the end of that verse just to reinforce what we've already said. Here again you see Scripture describing the church as that which Christ purchased with his own blood. He owns the church by right of purchase. He paid the price for his people therefore they belong to him. And what Paul is saying to these elders in the local church of Ephesus is that they are overseers, they are responsible for the spiritual oversight of the people of Christ; for those who belong to Christ, there are men that the Holy Spirit raises up in order to exercise spiritual care for the people of Christ.

Let me remind you that this is the kind of thing that Jesus said to Peter in John 21. Turn over there with me, if you will. In John 21:15, Christ says to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" Peter said, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.'" Verse 16, second time, "Simon, do you love Me?" "Yes, Lord, You know I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." Verse 17, third time, "Simon, do you love Me?" Peter is grieved. He said to him, "Lord, You know all things, you know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

And so Christ raises up men who have the responsibility to look after his people and over the course of time in our church we've talked on elder qualifications in our teaching from the book of Titus, I'm not going to repeat that material here, you can go to that and find the requirements and the responsibilities of elders in the church, and in chapter 4 of Ephesians, turn there with me as we kind of bring a few different passages to bear on it,

Ephesians 4:11, and the burning question at this point in our discussion is: who takes care of, who cares for these people that Christ bought with his own blood? How does Christ mediate his care, his love and his rule over his people? Well, Ephesians 4:11 says, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers." Why did he do that? Why did Christ create and fill these offices within the church? Verse 12, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Christ raises up men within his body to care for the body, to tend his sheep, to shepherd them, to take care of them. So Christ mediates his direction for the church, he mediates his care for his people through men who are called elders or overseers in the church, and these men as we've seen from the teaching in Titus, these are the men that have teaching and leadership authority in the local church and this is in part how Christ mediates his care.

Now Christ has mediated his care to individual believers by sending the Holy Spirit to indwell them, to be their Helper in an indwelling sort of way, and so we have that personal direct help from the Holy Spirit, but within the church there is this structure of leadership that Christ has established and the reality, beloved, is this, is that you can't evade this without evading Scripture itself. This is how Christ has established it and, beloved, it's always important for us to understand what Christ says to us in this context. It is the will of Jesus Christ that church members, that his people respond to these leaders with a teachable and an obedient spirit. Scripture is very clear on this and we would not be faithful to Scripture if we tried to evade this simply because it's an uncomfortable subject somehow for some people.

Look at Hebrews 13 with me, please. Hebrews 13 in verse 7, recognizing that the word of God has authority over the people of God. If you are a Christian, the word of God has authority over you and all of the word of God has authority over you, and follow me really carefully because this little tangent goes everywhere: we are either subject to all of the word of God, under all of its authority, or we're not under its authority at all, because if you believe and you practice in one way or another that I will pick and choose from the Bible what I will believe, then what you are saying is I am over the Bible and I will choose what I believe, I'll choose what I'll obey and I'll set aside the rest, and the Bible will be my authority where I say that it's my authority. Ha, think about that. Who's really the authority there? Who's kidding whom when we say that? There are people in the broader theological realm who say, "Well yes, the Bible's the word of God and it has authority but only in realms of faith and morals, in science and in history, you know, we need to help it out, we need to study and make decisions on our own and we'll reach our own conclusions about it." Well, beloved, that is a denial of the authority of Christ and the authority of Scripture in a completely different way, completely different realm, but it's the same principle. It's a man asserting his authority, his opinions over Scripture and saying, "I will determine what's authoritative." Scholars do this all the time, individual Christians do it also, and what we need to realize is that we come up against the authority of Scripture and we have to settle a very fundamental point as to who will be the boss here, who will be the authority, what will be the authority. So we come to Scripture and

we say, as I said on Sunday, "Speak, Lord, Your servant listens." I take the posture of little Samuel in saying, "Lord, speak to me. I'm listening. I'm a child here. I don't know what's best. You speak to me. I'll listen. I'll obey." That's the only way for anyone to approach Scripture. Anything else is a violation of the authority of God. It doesn't matter what the issue is, it's about a prior assumption, a prior attitude toward the word of God.

Well, Hebrews 13:7, the writer of Hebrews says, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." You have the oversight authority, those who led you; the teaching authority, those who spoke the word of God to you; and the example that elders are to be in leading the church, imitate their faith. So Scripture is really clear about this and says you remember this and remember who your leaders are and follow them.

In verse 17 it goes so far as to say, Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." It's not profitable for you to make things miserable for your elders. It's not profitable for you to make life difficult for your leaders and Scripture specifically cautions us in that direction.

Now let's just be real here, let's be candid, let's be raw with each other, shall we, as we look to Scripture. This principle of authority might be unsettling in a culture that resists authority, in a culture that for decades has lived by the principle "question authority," that celebrates rebels and more and more is drifting away from any sense of a 10 Commandment principle of honoring parents, which is a commandment which has implications for honoring employers and others who have any kind of authority over us. It's not just in the family unit, this principle of honoring authority is woven throughout Scripture in government, in the church and in the family and in other places that you could look at, in the workplace. So what we have to understand, what we have to come to grips with is that there is this principle of authority woven throughout God's entire created order that is also in place in the church.

And now, you know, I just leave that and commend that to your conscience for your consideration, and I trust the Spirit to work that out for you. I will say this, though, that the vast bulk of my pastoral ministry in almost eight years here at Truth Community Church, has been a delightful one with people like you that have just made it so easy and so delightful to spend time with you and to be a part of this body, and I am blessed to be here like this. I am teaching tonight not in order to lay out what Scripture says, not because I have a personal agenda in anything that I say, but I am responsible to God to bring out what he says about the order of his church even though, you know, it is what it is.

Now that all said, I like to bring this out, side-by-side with this there is a brilliant beautiful symmetry in Scripture about the nature of leadership in the local church. Christ has established this wonderful symmetry in the church. While there is this aspect of Christians being responsive to their leaders with a teachable and obedient spirit, there is a symmetry in the teaching of Scripture in this way, is that Christ commands the leaders, he

commands the elders to care for the flock with humble godliness. He first of all has established criteria by which men would be evaluated before they ever enter into the office of elder. Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3, you can read those passages on their own. A man is not to be quickly elevated into the office of elder. 1 Timothy 5 says that we are not to lay hands on men too quickly lest they become conceited and fall into the trap of the devil. So there are qualifications and men aren't just easily elevated into the office of church leadership. Not at all. We observe men over a long period of time to see their consistency, to see their claim to godliness, to see the level of their commitment even to the local church. You know, men who are indifferent and inconsistent in attending the church when it gathers, how could men like that ever be appropriate elders? If they're not with the flock, how are they going to lead the flock? I don't know the answer to that question. Actually I do know the answer to that question, it was just rhetorical.

So there are these qualifications in the interest of time, but in 1 Peter 5, turn to the right in your Bibles beyond the book of Hebrews toward the end and you'll find 1 Peter after the book of James, and in 1 Peter 5:1, there is this exhortation to the leaders and the elders in the church. As you're turning there, we remember also what we read from James just two days ago, James 3:1, "Let not many of you become teachers because as such you'll face a stricter judgment." So there are all these cautions about church leadership not being something to pursue lightly or to pursue quickly, and then Scripture comes with this admonition to those in leadership, 1 Peter 5:1, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

What I like to say at this point, what I would love to say to the convocation of seminary students or any of those that are on the front end of pursuing church leadership, and I've said this to men in seminary in the past: God gives leadership to men in the church so that with a purpose, church leaders have authority so that Christ can carry out his intentions to bless his people found in the church. It is not for the wealth or the prestige of the leader. Authority is given to elders just like it's given to parents in order that they might set an environment of protection and love where those under the authority can flourish, can grow, can feel protection, can feel safe, can flourish, in other words, to use the same word twice. Parents are given their authority not to dominate their children but to raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In parallel fashion, by way of analogy, we understand that leadership is given to men in the church not for their own benefit but so that they might be instruments that Christ uses to protect, bless and feed his sheep. Church leadership is not a place for me who are on an ego trip, who are on a power trip. I've seen men like that in eldership, not here, elsewhere. It's an ugly sight when men with personal ambition are in the role of an elder. That is not the design of Christ at all.

So we see that the church belongs to Christ, the church consists of true believers, we see that the church has spiritual leaders and it brings us to our fourth and final point this evening which we've been presupposing all along and it is this, and transcending even

over the elders is something even greater that we're all under and it's point 4 and it's this: the church is subject to Scripture. The church is subject to Scripture. Jesus Christ is the Word of God Incarnate. The 66 books of the Bible is the word of God written and Jesus Christ directs his church through the pages of Scripture. That's why it's so central to what we do, it is why our church has the name Truth Community Church, because truth is everything.

In 1 Corinthians 14:37, look back there with me, if you will, 1 Corinthians 14:37, the Apostle Paul directly appointed, immediately appointed by Christ and personally instructed by Christ himself, the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:37, he says this, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized." Paul says, "The words that I write are the Lord's commandments through me." And in Scripture now this written enscripturated word from God, we have the commandments of God, the rule of God, the authority of God mediated through his Scripture, asserted through his Scripture.

One other passage, 1 Timothy 3. We'll have more to say about these things over the next three messages, but in 1 Timothy 3:15 it says this, interestingly saying it immediately after he sets forth the qualifications for church leadership in verses 1 through 13, and in verse 14 he says, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long," verse 15, "but in case I am delayed, I write so that," do you see the purpose statement, the purpose clause here? Why do you write, Paul? What's your purpose in saying these things to us? "I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." The Scriptures are the word of God which he has given to us so that we would know how to conduct ourselves in the household that belongs to him. In the realm that belongs to Christ, the word of God is given to us so that we know what we are to do, how we are to be, how we are to love one another which is going to be the major focus of the message on Sunday, I'm very eager to preach that, but that's for five days from now. But the church is subject to Scripture. The people of God are subject to the word of God. That goes for all of us whether we're members, whether we're leaders, we're all under the authority of Scripture and as John MacArthur has often said, the authority of church leadership begins and ends with Scripture. I don't have a right to look at your checkbook, to give just one example of that. But the elders are equipped with the authority to teach, to oversee, but all under the Scripture, and we'll talk about this more in the days to come.

So the church is that group of people called by God and born of the Spirit who are true believers in Christ. Christ, believers in Christ. That means that the church belongs to Christ. True believers, those genuinely born again, the church with leadership and yet leaders and members together all under the authority of the one book of God. How important is the church? I'm gonna answer that in two ways. How important is the church in the scheme of things? How important is the church in the scheme of the universe? In the scheme of eternity? In the scheme and the genius of the mind of God, how important is it? It's important enough for God the Son to die for it, it must be pretty important. Everything that we see going on in the political world around us, passing to the point of

irrelevancy, and most of the world missing what is actually the focus of God's work in history in the building of his people and calling a people out to himself. How important is the church? Christ died for it, that settles it. Christ loves the church, that settles it.

I like what the theologian, Bruce Milnes, said and I quote, listen to this carefully, this is sweet, "It was God's love for the church that brought Christ to Calvary, hence the measure of our conformity with the mind of Christ will be the extent of our concern for the church." Christ loved the church, that means that someone who says that he loves Christ will love what Christ loves. Do you see how there can be no space between those two things? There cannot be any idea in a biblical mind that says, "I love Christ but I want nothing to do with the church." That can't be. Christ loves the church and if you love Christ, you will love what he loves. Christ died for his church. Beloved, his people will want to live for the church.

I am so grateful for those of you that share that priority. I invite those of you who until now have not, to come to Christ and to follow in his love for the church.

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we were once lost and separated from God, blind, deaf, mute, lame, but in great love You came to seek and to save us, in great love You went to the cross of Calvary and laid down Your life as a substitute for Your people. You bore the stroke of the wrath which was our due. Thank You for that, for Your obedience which saves us, and in response, dear Christ, we ask You now to grant to us Your love for Your people as we live in Your church in this day and age. Grant us the mind of Christ that we might be the people individually and corporately that You have called us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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