

Christ's Authority over the Church

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Bible Text: Titus 1:1

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We're so glad that you're here. Not just for today but so glad that so many of you are showing such faithfulness to this fellowship. I'm very excited about the condition of our fellowship and where we're going and where we've come from and you're all an integral part of that. It wouldn't be happening without the people of God gathering around the teaching of his word and wanting to learn it and receive it and respond to it and that's what we're doing here. And what's going on right now for those of you that are new to, this is your first time here, is that we're really starting to move into a serious consideration of what it means to be a church and contrary to what people might think from just observing the Christian scene over the past 20 years, you're not a church just because you can put together a praise band and have flashing lights on a Sunday morning. There is so much more to that and those kinds of superficial trivialities are really not what the church is about at all and so we have begun together a voyage over the past several months to establish a real New Testament church in this area and we're very grateful that the Lord has opened this opportunity for us. You know, there is something special about being in the position that we are, starting a church from scratch. It's kind of like home cooking from scratch with all of the fresh ingredients. You see all the separate ingredients come together with a fresh outcome and our opportunity is to be able to build something without a lot of accumulated baggage from the past and be able to go and just look at God's word and say, "Lord, what does your word say about the church? What does your word say should be the marks of a church? What should we be aiming after?" and simply let the word of God inform that for us.

You see, we don't want to simply call ourselves a church at Truth Community; that's not what we're interested in at all. We want to be a church. We want to be a church where the Lord Jesus Christ is the head. We want to be a church where he looks down and says, "That's what I had in mind from the very beginning," and that's what our aspiration and our goal is. We're not trying to be the biggest church that's ever graced the Cincinnati area, rather we're simply trying to be the most biblical church and see what the Lord does with that and that's why we're going to take our time as we lay this foundation. If we're going to be a church, we have to understand what the features of a church are. We need to know what the Bible says a church should look like.

For those of you that are visiting with us, we've come to the book of Titus in the New Testament and I would invite you to turn there because we see in the book of Titus a parallel for our own situation in the 21st century. Paul wrote this letter to his apostolic representative, Titus, and said, "I want you to establish churches on the island of Crete. I want you to appoint elders in every city as I directed you," and then he lays out what the church should look like. So, Titus is designed for just a time as this and I'm very, very grateful to the Lord to be here at this time in my life and this time in your lives for us to be able to look at this together.

Let's look at the first four verses. I'll just read those. We're not going to go through all of them here today but we'll just read these verses to set the stage for us. Titus 1:1-4,

"1 Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, 2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, 3 but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior, 4 To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

You see right from the beginning that what we have here is a letter. It is a letter from Paul to Titus and Paul is writing to one of his converts, one of the men who served alongside him in ministry, and he's writing to give him greeting and to give him instruction on what he wants Titus to do. Now, the letter writing custom in ancient times is a little different than what we're used to. We write a letter and we address the person that we're writing, "Dear John," and then we say everything that we have to say and then we put our name right at the very bottom of it. Theoretically, you don't know who is saying these things to you until you get to the very last word. The custom in the first century of letter writing was the exact opposite. The letter writer opened with his own name and thus said who it was that was writing. He would address his reader and then give a greeting followed by what it was that he wanted to say and we see this structure here in verses 1 and 4. Look at verse 1 with me again, "Paul," there's the author of the letter despite what some modern critics have said. It says right from the beginning who wrote this letter, it's "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." Now what I want you to see is just a little bit of the structure here. Paul goes on in the rest of verse 1 and verses 2 and 3 and expands on a whole lot of things that he wants to say. It's a very complex sentence structure, actually, but I want you to skip all of that to simply see the very basic structure. Verse 1, "Paul"; verse 4, "To Titus." This is a letter from Paul to Titus and he calls Titus, "my true child in a common faith," and then he greets him, "grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

So that's a little bit of the structure here. Paul, the apostle, is writing to his servant in ministry, to Titus, and says to Titus, "Greetings, I have some things that I want to say to you in this letter." That's the basic structure here but what you have, as Paul now expands on that structure after he gives his opening name, what you have here is an extremely valuable insight into the nature of what the church is to be. If you've only read through Titus maybe going through an annual Bible reading plan, it would be very easy to read through this quickly and miss the significance of everything that is being said. But I want you to think with me a little bit because what we have here in front of us is of such monumental importance for the present and the immediate and the long-term future of our church that I don't want you to miss it.

Look at verse 5 for a moment, just to refresh your thinking. Here we are in a fellowship, we've been meeting together loosely. We have an advisory committee but we don't have formally installed leadership at this time. Well, that's the situation that Paul was writing into to Titus. Look at verse 5, he says,

"5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you."

Paul says, "I'm writing to help you establish the churches and the first thing that you need to do is to establish elders," and so that's the basic thing that's going on. But before he ever gets to verse 5, he lays forth the foundation of authority that under girds the entire establishment of a New Testament church. What we're going to look at in today's message are two fundamental principles of a biblical church that underlie the foundation of our entire future together here at Truth Community. This is so basic but it is so profound that I want to spend some time. You know, I had like a seven or ten part sermon prepared for this morning and we were going to go through all of this in 60 minutes and then I looked back at my normal pattern and I said, "Ha, that's never going to happen. I can't get through ten points in two hours, let alone in 60 minutes." So I decided to break this out over two or three messages so that we could just take our time. One of the things that I want you to understand is that by taking our time, we are emphasizing how important and fundamental this is. This is not something to rush through.

Let's back up and think about it for a minute. We're all used to one degree or another of being in places where the Bible is handled with superficiality and it's not taken very seriously. In light of everything that we read in Scripture earlier and the songs that we sang, we should begin to understand and we should begin to have an ever-deepening appreciation for the significance of what Christ did in order to purchase the church. He gave his life for us. He laid down his own innocent blood on our behalf. We're talking about the sinless Son of God, the Maker of heaven and earth, making such a profound journey to this guilty sod in order to redeem a people for himself. Well, if we're going to take that seriously, we realize, "Well, let's take a little bit of time and think through what that means. Let's not just rush through this. Let's not just be self-centered about, 'Well, what can help me with my life today.'" Let's set that kind of stuff aside for a little while and simply say, "What does the church mean to Christ? What does the church mean

to Jesus Christ? What are his intentions in the church?" Let's honor him by saying, "Lord, what is it that you think about the church and how can we conform ourselves to that?" Jesus said in Matthew 6 that "if you seek first his kingdom and his righteousness all these other things will be added to you," and so rather than coming with all of the things that occupy our minds from day-to-day and week-to-week, we have an opportunity over these next couple of weeks to just step back and say, "Jesus, what do you think? What do you think about the church?" because he's laid it out for us here in his word.

We're going to see two fundamental principles of a biblical church and this first one, we are laying a cornerstone of profound importance for whatever happens in the next 50 years with this church. This is a cornerstone that everything is built on. I can't over-emphasize the important of what we're about to see. Point number one here is that we're going to see from Paul's opening in this letter: Christ's authority over the church. That's our first point if you're taking handwritten notes today. We're seeing Christ's authority over the church. Now, let's ask ourselves a question, let's be a modest skeptic here for just a moment. We look at this and we say, "Okay, you say that Paul is writing to Titus and telling him how the church should be structured 2,000 years ago." Fair enough. Who does Paul think that he is to be able to make such authoritative instructions and to lay out that kind of defining impact on the spiritual lives of an entire huge island in the Mediterranean sea. "Paul, who do you think you are to tell us what to do?" Fair question. We can't just take anybody's word for it. Well notice the brilliance of this: Paul lays it out from the very beginning, the first words out of his mouth after his name establishes his authority to speak to the church, not only in the first century but with authority that carries on through today as well.

Look at verse 1 with me, "Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." Those are no superficial words there. Paul, in that opening phrase, in those two appositives that he's making, "I'm Paul," that means, "I'm a bond-servant of God. I'm Paul, I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ," is defining who he is and establishing the authority by which he writes and gives instruction for how the church of Jesus Christ is to be established. He calls himself a bond-servant of God, it's the Greek word *doulos*. He's a slave; he's a slave of God. This is a phrase, this idea of being a servant of God, it's a phrase that was applied to Old Testament leaders like Moses and Joshua and the prophets. We won't bother looking at the various passages like that but Paul is equating himself as a man of God, as an authoritative leader in the kingdom of God saying, "I'm a slave of God," using the exact same phrase that is used to describe the greatest leaders of the Old Testament and those who were the authorized, recognized, authoritative revealers of the word of God to the people of Israel. He's taking that title upon himself. He's speaking with great authority when he says, "I am a slave of God. I am a bond-servant of God."

Now, why would he call himself that? This is really the only place where he uses this particular phrase "a slave of God, a bond-servant of God." Bond-servant of Christ Jesus, yes, but here he calls himself a bond-servant of God with an Old Testament ring to it. Why would he do that here in the book of Titus? Well, it's quite interesting actually. As you read through the book of Titus, you find that there are Jewish influences, bad Jewish influences that are going on amongst these people and so Paul is writing in part to counteract those Jewish influences that are there in the church and by equating himself with the Old Testament leaders that any Jew would recognize as being an authorized one to speak on behalf of God, Paul says, "I am equivalent with them. You must listen to me because I belong to God. God has called me. I serve him. I'm an instrument of the fulfillment of the will of God. I have no will of my own. I'm a bond-servant of God," he says, and he equates his authority with the Old Testament figures so that those Jewish elements in the church could not disregard him. Bond-servant of God, a slave of God, he says.

Then he goes on and he calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ. We looked a couple of weeks ago at the conversion of Paul and an apostle is one who is commissioned, one who is sent. One who speaks on behalf of another with a commission from that one that authorizes him to speak with the same authority as the one who sent him. So, for Paul to say "I'm a slave of God and I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ," he's saying, "Jesus Christ has sent me to speak with authority on his behalf." He's saying that, "I am a chosen agent of the church of Christ. I write with his authority." When you read the accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts 9, 22 and 26, you can see Christ speaking to him and you see quite clearly that Christ laid hold of Paul for his own purposes. Paul did not volunteer to come to Christ on his own. You remember as he was on the road to Damascus, he was actually threatening and persecuting the church of Christ when Jesus Christ appeared to him and stopped him in his tracks. It was a sovereign exercise of authority by Christ to stop Paul where he

was at and Paul's response was, "Lord, what shall I do?" He realized the surpassing authority of Christ as Christ made himself known to him and Christ said, "I am going to send you to the Gentiles. I'm going to send you to preach. I'm going to use you as an instrument to establish my church."

Now on the other side of Paul's life, we look back and we hold in our Bibles and we look at it and we see that's exactly what happened. Thirteen letters from the Apostle Paul to different places which lay out the revealed word of God to the church of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks with authority because that authority was conferred upon him by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ so that has really significant implications for us. Paul was not a man writing with independent authority; this wasn't Paul's idea about what the church should be. Understand this, beloved, this is so crucial: Paul is carrying out orders from the Master. Paul is delivering the word of God to the people of God. Paul is setting forth from Christ himself, "What I want my church to be." You know, Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church." Well, one of the ways that he does it is through apostolic teaching and here's the point, this is an intangible point but it is so profoundly important for us right now.

As we look at this and we say Paul is writing with authority as a slave of God, an instrument of the revelation of God, an apostle of Jesus Christ, beloved, we all have to gather around this first fundamental principle if we're going to be a church together. This is what we all have to be agreed on, united upon and to realize that this is the cornerstone of everything else that comes in the future for us: if we want to be a church, we must honor and submit to the authority of Jesus Christ which he has revealed through his apostles in the New Testament. You see, it's the authority of Christ that matters in the church. It's not about what you and I think, it's really not even about what you and I want. What our desire is, what our goal is, what we're aiming at with the best of our sin-limited capabilities is to say, "Christ, what have you said through your servants, the apostles, how is it that you want the church to look like? What do you want the church to look like? What do you want it to be? What are we supposed to do? We look to you, Lord Jesus, rather than bringing our own sets of desires as if what we wanted were the preeminent thing that matters.

I can't remember if I've mentioned this before, this has been on my mind so much. A little conversation that happened in the very first days when we were gathering together. I was speaking with someone who was investigating our fellowship, "Maybe I'll come here, maybe I won't." I'll never, ever forget because it just pressed on my mind so much, this person said, "You know, do you have to meet at 9 a.m.? That's so early to get up. Can't we meet later?" I wanted to say, "Do you want some cheese with that little bit of whine that you're giving me there?" I say that to illustrate something really important to you. By the way, you're probably wondering, "Well, what did you say to them?" I was gracious, I said, "Yeah, we're going to see how all the timing of all of that works out, blah, blah, blah." But look, what I want you to see is that that mindset reflects the way people have been conditioned to think about the church for the past 35 years since the advent of seeker-sensitive ministry. The idea is that, "You as a church exist to fulfill my desires. I want it this particular way and if you can't meet what I want, if we can't meet at 10 then I may not come." The self-centeredness of that and I'm sure this person didn't really appreciate the full significance of what they were saying but that's so incredibly self-centered. That's not good. That's not good. The question isn't, "What are you going to teach? What's your view of the role of Scripture?" It's, "Can you give me a time that's convenient for me to get up on Sunday morning?" I honestly wanted to say, you would be impressed with my level of self-control at that moment if you had witnessed it take place and knew what was in my heart at that time, "You're worried about getting up at 10 a.m.? Are you kidding me? Do you know what Christ did to purchase the church? Do you think it was convenient for him to leave the glories of heaven? Do you think the road to Calvary with the cross on his back was convenient to him? Do you think that hanging there dying for your sins was something of convenience to him? And you're going to come and try to insist on a particular meeting time? Please."

We have to view this differently, beloved. If we're going to come together and be a church, we have to view it differently and realize that we may need to separate ourselves from the way church leaders and prominent book writers for the past two generations have been writing and conditioning us to think as we are consumers to be pleased rather than servants to come under the authority of Christ and be what he wants us to be. This is absolutely fundamental. We must be united around this principle that the authority of Christ is supreme in the church and that what he thinks is what matters to us.

Why does Christ have that authority? Why can't we be like any other club? Why can't we be like the Rotary and just kind of decide what we want to do and just go out and do it? Well, that's not what a church does. That's not the point of a church. We aren't independent in our authority making this what we want it to be. You see, there's a purpose that Christ wanted to carry out. Oh, this is so important, beloved. Oh, this is so vitally important. The people that grasp this and embrace it and support the work of Truth Community going forward, this is our opportunity to lay forward a trajectory that we pray that God would bless and honor that outlives all of us because we're devoting ourselves to a purpose that transcends our own individual lives.

Look at Titus 2:14. I want you to see this. Who is it that has prerogative in the church? Whose authority is it that matters? Whose voice do we listen to? Let's start in verse 11,

“11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”

Watch this in verse 14. Here's why Christ has authority in the church. This is why we submit to Christ and don't simply assert our own prerogatives without seeing what Scripture has to say about every issue that affects the church. Verse 14, speaking of Christ Jesus,

“14 He gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession.”

You see, the church is a people that belongs to Christ. Why do the people of the church belong to Christ? Because he bought them. He bought them with his own blood and so by right of purchase, Christ has the prerogative and authority to direct what happens among his people. You see, our first question when we come together as we form together as a church is not, “What do I want?” The first question is, “What does Christ want?” because it belongs to him. Christ bought a people throughout ages, throughout cultures, to be his own and those of us that have a part in that, we who are a subset of that, as we come together to form a church, we recognize with great humility and with great gratitude the fact that Christ is sovereign over the church, that Christ purchased us with his own blood and therefore our question – watch this – our question is the exact same question that the Apostle Paul asked when Christ stopped him on the road to Damascus. Look at Acts 22. We're talking about the authority of Christ and how we respond to it. We recognize his authority and the question is not, “Oh, what do I want this to be?” We ask a different question and when you frame the right question, you get the right answer. If you ask wrong questions, “What do I want here?” then you're going to get a wrong answer that's driven by your own selfish motivations. We can't do that as a body of believers together. I'm speaking to all of us corporately.

Look at what happened to Paul in Acts 22:6. Paul is speaking here, describing to others his testimony and he says, “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'” “I saw this great manifestation of glory and authority and I said, 'Who are you?' This was something new. I didn't recognize this from prior experience.” Verse 9, “And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.” “There were other people around but I was the only one who understood what the Lord was saying.” And notice in response to this display of authority and glory, what Saul said. Verse 10, “And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?’” You see, that is always the response of believing people to the person of Jesus Christ, “What shall I do? What do you want from me?” Jesus said in Luke 6:46, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?” You see, there's this principle of authority. Who has the right to speak and direct in the church of God and the Scriptures say that that authority belongs to Christ alone and so we have to honor his authority.

Now, the Bible addresses this elsewhere lest you think that I'm making too much of a couple of words in Paul's introduction to Titus. Go to the Great Commission in Matthew 28. I want you to see this because this

shapes everything. This shapes everything. Matthew 28:18. I actually preached on this here about 14 months ago, on this passage. "And Jesus came up and spoke to them," spoke to 11 disciples from verse 16, "saying," here it is, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." All authority. You see, we've been conditioned by so much contemporary Christian music to think about Jesus as our boyfriend or girlfriend, "Oh Jesus, I love you and you love me, blah, blah, blah," that the role of the authority of Christ is getting lost as if he were simply an emotional companion in a co-dependent relationship to carry on and to give us a little bump day-by-day through life. Oh no, no, no, no, no. Christ is the one with all authority. He was standing before the disciples in Matthew 28 as the resurrected Lord, the one who had conquered death and saying, "All authority belongs to me in heaven and on earth. Here is what I say you should do." Well, the only proper mental way for us to frame our response is to fall on our knees and say, "Yes Lord, what would you have me do? What should I do? Speak because your servant listens."

Now, I realize that understanding exactly the details of what Christ says remains to be unfolded as we study Scripture together but we have to view Christ with reverence, with respect and with submission. If he has called us together to be a local church in this place, if he is forming together a body to serve him for decades to come, then we must view him with all respect as the Lord and Master and say, "Lord, this is for your glory. This is not about us and if it happened that they changed the service to 8:30, I would still be here because it's not about me, Lord, it's about what you want."

Now, I'm not suggesting that Scripture speaks about whether a service should start at 9 or 10, that's not the point at all, you understand that. What I'm talking about, beloved, what I'm talking about is the fundamental way that you and I think about the church of Jesus Christ. When we walk through the doors of our place, while we're here temporarily in Legacy Hall, one day when we come to our own facility, when we walk through the doors, we have to approach this with the mindset of, "I'm here to serve. I'm here to serve Christ. I'm here to contribute to the furtherance of his purposes," rather than approaching it saying, "What's in it for me?" As if I were the sovereign here, "I'm the consumer and you have to satisfy what I want or I'm going to pack my bags and take them someplace else." Look, look: you know and I know that there are dozens of churches that are just waiting to do your bidding. What you have to grasp in the depth of your heart, in the inner sanctuary of your deepest affections, whether Truth Community is the place for you or not, what you have to grasp is that it's not about me. Whether this pleases me is very, very secondary to whether this place, this church is an instrument of the furtherance of the purposes of Jesus Christ or not.

That's the first question you ask about a church: is this a church for Christ or not? Then you can start to think about the issue properly because all authority has been given to him on heaven and earth. Ephesians 4 talks about Christ being the head of the church. He's the head in the sense that he's the authority over it. Beloved, and some of you have been here for a long time, your continual presence tells me this is where your affections are forming and taking root. I'm delighted in that. You know what? I came from a big church back in California where there was a lot of good people back there: a lot of people I loved and that loved me." But you know what? I'd never go back because I want to be right here with you. I want us to serve this together. I want us to build this together and I just want you to know, as a pastor, my affections are upon this body here that's in front of me. It's you that I care about. It's you that I want to serve with my pastoral ministry. I'm going to die in this place unless somebody ships me out, puts me in a box and buries me someplace. It's against my will. This is where I want to be and I say that because I see in your continual being here week after week that you're finding some affections here around the word of God as well. What I want you to see and what I want to impress upon you – you know, we were going through life kind of circling in different areas and didn't even know each other at a time. What's pulled us together now is a force of gravity, so to speak, this is an illustration, I'm not talking about literal physics here but there's a center of gravity that is pulling us together around the word of God and as we solidify that together, as we grow in that together, the first principle that we see as we start to say, "Okay, we're going to become a church. This is going to happen." The first principle that we see is that we all unite around and agree upon is the fact that Christ is the authority in this place and Christ expresses his authority through his word and if we come as servants rather than consumers, that changes the whole dynamic of what animates the atmosphere and the environment of Truth Community.

We're coming as servants. Coming to serve Christ who died for us and so look, I want to be the first one to say, "Truth Community is not my church," and I hope that you'll join in and say, "You know what? It's not

mine either.” Truth Community belongs to Christ. We seek the will of Christ in this place, not our own. We have the idea. We have the fundamental affection. We have the fundamental desire. When we think about this fellowship and becoming a church we say it's simply our privilege to serve Christ in a place with other people of like affections for him. You see, that's what matters. It's not my church. It's not your church. We want this place to belong to Christ. We dedicate Truth Community to his glory and his purposes. Our prayer is, “Lord, make it something that outlives every one of us. Let there be a Truth Community 50 years from now that's standing for these same principles, still devoted to your glory, still serving you even if none of us are here to see it.” We're laying a foundation that other people are going to stand on. We're planting trees that other people are going to come and eat the fruit of but that's only going to happen if we submit ourselves to the recognition of who's in authority.

The church belongs to Christ and that means something. It means a lot of things but one thing it means if we're really truly serious and devoted about this, you and I truly devote the core of people that prefer Christ over our own desires and serving him and opposed to being served, do you know what's going to happen? It's going to be really sweet. People won't even realize it but overly opinionated, selfish people won't feel comfortable here. People with their own agendas won't come and stay because they'll realize that the will of someone else is being served even if they can't articulate it. They'll just recognize it. On the other hand, on the other hand, if we establish this under the authority of Christ and we just commit ourselves, “Lord, whatever happens and in all of our fumbling, imperfect ways, above all we want to honor your authority,” do you know what's going to happen is that other people who have that same desire are going to be attracted here. The Lord will bring others who want that as well. But you and I have to settle in our minds what is it that we want from a church.

Well, Scripture says, it starts with wanting the authority of Christ to be displayed. We want Christ to truly be honored. We really want to obey him and we want to do the hard things. We want to do hard things even if people leave. We want to do hard things even if people criticize. We want to do the hard faithful things even if it brings the mocking of others around us, others that mock the role of sequential Bible teaching in the church. We're going to do that because we think that's how we can honor the word of God and we're not going to be dissuaded by those who say this is not what the world wants. You know what? I don't care what the world wants. I want what Christ wants. You see, that's not just me speaking, that needs to be your heart speaking as well. I don't care what the world wants. We want what Christ wants here and when we find that, we're going to do it. When we find that, we're going to be it.

How do we do that? How do we respond to the authority and pre-eminence of Christ? That brings us to our second point here this morning. This is going to be five little subpoints and I'll tell you in advance that I was out shopping and there was a sale. There was a sale on the letter S and so I bought a few S's and I'm just going to line all these things up under all the S's that I bought here. Here's our second point: the spiritual impact of Christ's authority in the church. Now that we've said this, now that we've said that the authority of Christ is what matters, how do we start to unpack the implications of this? This is very far-reaching because the authority of Christ when it is honored in a church, it permeates the life of that church from beginning to end not only on a Sunday morning in a pulpit but throughout the life of those who become a part of that body. I'm going to give you five ways that display the spiritual impact of the authority of Christ in the church.

Turn back to the book of Titus with me. What's the first impact of the authority of Christ in the church? Recognizing that he is the risen Lord over all and especially over the people that he redeemed. First of all, what's the spiritual impact of that? 1. That we speak with authority. We speak with authority and this is directly called for by the plain words of Scripture. Look at chapter 2, verse 15 of Titus. After Paul had gone on about the grace of God appearing, instructing us to deny ungodliness, look for the blessed hope, Christ gave himself to purify a people for his own possession. After all of that great profound theology that I can't wait to get to and unpack together with you, look at what he says in chapter 2, verse 15,

“15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”

It is proper, it is obedient to Christ that in the teaching of the church there would be a sound of authority that comes. Not because of who the pastor is, not because the pastor wants it his way, not because the pastor is personally a dictator trying to involve himself in the private details of everyone's life, that's not it at all. I'll never be that kind of pastor because I don't want that. Rather, what Paul is describing here to Titus is, "As a servant of God, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, what I'm telling you is that these things of which I am writing to you that come by revelation of the Holy Spirit through me, these things are to be taught with authority," and therefore that tone of authority that is derivative of the authority of Christ, that tone of authority marks the teaching of the church. We're not engaging in speculation here. We are speaking certainties that God has revealed in his word and I like to remind people of this. I like to say this: when God has declared something to be true, when God has made himself known in creation and in the Scriptures and he has made that known in an authoritative way, you know what that means for you and me as a church? What that means is: we don't have the prerogative to diminish that and speak in terms of speculation or probabilities, "Maybe this is true but maybe it's not." We don't have the prerogative to say you consider all of the evidence and there's probably a God in the universe. You know, when you're saying that, what you're saying is it's possible that there's not. We're not weighing probabilities as we speak the authoritative word of God, we are speaking what he has revealed with authority through his apostles and so there should be a note of authority in the teaching that takes place in a church.

Look, I understand that is contrary to the post-modern spirit of our age, "You have your truth, I have mine. I'll tolerate yours, you tolerate mine." I get all of that. What we have to realize, what we're talking about here: when we see Paul speaking like this, "Speak and exhort and reprove with all authority," we're talking about the authority of Christ clashing with the spirit of our age and what we have to do, what you and I have to do, is say, "Okay, that's not going to be very popular but you know what? I'm okay with that because what matters to me is the authority of Christ." The spirit of the age has no authority over the church of Christ. We speak and confront the spirit of the age, we don't conform ourselves to it because Christ has spoken with authority.

Look at chapter 3, verse 8. You can see that Paul was concerned about this because Titus, as we're going to see, was speaking into a culture different from ours but with the same rebellious, lawless attitude that rejected authority, particularly revealed authority from God. "Titus," Paul says to him, he says, "Titus, you've got to speak these things with all authority," and he repeats himself in chapter 3, verse 8 when he says,

"3 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men."

"Titus, speak with confidence. Speak with authority." This is the appropriate way for the people of Christ to represent him on earth is to, with humility but without diminishment of the note of authority that comes through the word of God. Christ did not save us, Christ did not redeem the church so that pastors would get up in a pulpit and just serve oatmeal day after day after day, that squishy little stuff that doesn't matter, that you forget a week later.

That's not what the church is about, therefore, when teaching takes place under the umbrella of Truth Community, it's not going to be teaching that's filled with frivolity. It's not going to be teaching that's hesitating, "Oh, I don't know." Well, if you don't know, then go back to your study and come back when you do know and then speak. Look, here's what's so crucial about that is that we go back, remember where we started. This is authority in the church, it's the person of Jesus Christ. "All authority has been given to me." That means that those who speak for him can't diminish his authority with a frivolous, haphazard, entertaining view of what teaching should be like. We speak with authority because that's what Christ requires from us. It's not that we're putting ourselves forward, "We proclaim not ourselves," Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, "but Christ Jesus is Lord." And when you proclaim Christ Jesus is Lord, there is just going to be authority in that because Christ himself is the authority being presented.

Now, secondly, spending another S here. Secondly, this might surprise you where this goes. What I did was I kind of followed through just Paul's own writings how it worked out in his mind. What did the pre-

eminence of Christ mean in the way that Paul dealt with the church and the way that he handled himself? First, we speak with authority; secondly, we seek unity in Christ. We seek unity in Christ. Turn to 1 Corinthians 1. We're going to look at a few passages here. We seek unity in Christ and what that means is that because we're servants, we are unwilling to rob our Master of his glory even if people are trying to share glory with us and to elevate us as individuals. We refuse that. We say no to that because we recognize the pre-eminence and the authority and the exclusive privilege and prerogative of Christ in the church.

1 Corinthians 1:10. Paul is writing and he says, "I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," in the name, in the authority of Jesus Christ here's what I have to say to you, "that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this," he says, "Okay, let me be specific. I'll tell you exactly what I'm talking about here so there's no confusion here." He says, "Here's what I mean by that," in verse 12, "each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.'" I'm a Paul follower. I'm an Apollos follower. I'm a Peter follower. I'm a Christ follower. There are all of these little divisions within the church of Corinth.

Look at what Paul says about that, look at how he responds and makes Christ pre-eminent and elevates the authority and prerogative of Christ as a means of dealing with that division and bringing people back to unity. This is so overwhelmingly powerful. Paul says in verse 13, "Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" He's saying, "Remember who your authority is. Remember who your head is. Remember who the source of life is. Paul is not the issue. Apollos, Peter, is not the issue. Don't you remember? Who was it that died for you? In whose name were you baptized?" Oh, it was Christ. It was Christ. It was Christ. "That's right, it's about Christ. It's not about men." It's not about speakers. It's not about books or any of this other junk. "I'm a follower of so-and-so and so-and-so." No, no, no, no.

We all rally around and unite around the person and the authority of Christ because he is the one who died for us. He is the one who purchased us. He is the one who has all authority over heaven and earth. And all of this other stuff comes under that umbrella; it is submitted to that until it dissipates into oblivion. It's about Christ and we unite around Christ rather than a particular teacher or pastor or preacher and we do that because we are so concerned for the glory of Christ that we don't want anyone to have his eyes on us. We want their eyes on the one who was elevated at Calvary and thereafter drew men to himself. That unifies us. It's not John against Bob. It's not Sarah against Susan. It's about an entire body of believers being united and devoted to Christ and that unifies us.

Thirdly, we set our minds on Christ's power. Authority and power kind of go together but we're talking about something a little bit different here. We set our minds on Christ's power and here's what we mean by that: Christ builds the church by his authority and by his power, not by what we do. Oh, we're faithful to do what we do, we want to gather together and preach and fellowship and observe the ordinances and exercise church discipline when that's necessary. We get all of that but we understand that we're not driving that. We don't have the authority. We don't have the power. We don't have the ability to bring a single sinner to Christ. We don't have the power and the ability to by ourselves produce growth in any individual Christian. That is just outside the realm of the power of man. So, what that means is that we set our minds on Christ's power.

Look at chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians, verses 1-5. Paul again is speaking. This is the Paul who is the servant of God, the apostle of Jesus Christ in the beginning of Titus. Well, how did that view of Christ, how did that role that he asserts there play out in the way that he conducted his ministry? That's what we're interested in. What's the spiritual impact of believing in and honoring the authority of Christ? Chapter 2, verse 1, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

Paul said, "I didn't try to go through a bunch of rhetorical flourishes or to display myself as being a strong and mighty man and a strong and mighty speaker." He said, "I came, I was trembling as I did it but I just declared to you the crucified and risen Christ and I trusted God to display his power through the inherent, intrinsic power of that message." He said, "I was relying on the power of Christ as I ministered to you. I wasn't doing it in my own flesh."

Chapter 3, verse 5. Actually, let's pick it up in verse 3 because it will reinforce the point on unity. We're on our third subpoint here: we speak with authority; we seek unity in Christ; we set our minds on Christ's power. Look at verse 3. This is a bleed over into point 2 which we've already finished but that's okay. Draw a little arrow from your notes going back up the page or something, that will help you out. Paul says, verse 3, "you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?" You're looking at this from a totally human perspective. You're viewing this entirely wrongly because you don't have your mind on Christ when you're talking about who your favorite human teachers are. Paul says, he demonstrates it in verse 5, he's setting his mind on Christ's power rather than on what he is doing in the ministry. Verse 5, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?" We're nothing. We're just, "Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one." We're just servants. We're servants under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's all we are. "We're just servants so why are you gathering around and elevating the servant to the neglect of the glory of Christ?" he says. You can feel the passion bleeding out of this because, beloved, get this: he so loves Christ and he's so enamored with the glory and the authority of Christ that the thought of someone ascribing something to him is utterly repulsive to him, he does not want that. He says, "I don't want you to be talking about you're one of mine. I'm just a servant."

And the Lord is the one who gave the opportunity. Look at what he says in verse 6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth." That's what I mean by saying that he has mind set on the power of Christ. He says, "As I see growth taking place, as growth was occurring in the realm of Corinth, it was not attributable to me. It was the fact that God was working through his appointed servants and through the appointed message and God was producing the results that he wanted, therefore, stop setting your eyes on the human servants and lift your eyes up and set your mind on the power of God and the power of Christ that is at work in the proclamation of the Scriptures." As the apostolic message is preached, the one who sent the apostles is at work himself and we recognize his hidden hand and we give him the glory and disclaim any of it from ourselves. We're not about gathering around men. We simply want to set our mind and affection and our love and our trust on the power of Christ.

I think it was George Whitefield who said, his prayer was, "Let the name of George Whitefield perish from the face of the earth," as he was an instrument of sweeping revivals that have hardly been seen since its day, as the power of Christ was being manifested and people were being converted under his very Calvinistic preaching, his heart in the midst of it was, "I hope my name perishes from the face of the earth just so long as Christ is elevated and men come to him and love him and serve him as the one with authority."

Beloved, that's not just an attitude for the preacher and the pastor, although it needs to start there. The preacher, the pastor has to have that embedded in his mind and always under the authority of that prevailing sentiment that this is about Christ and if there are results that come, it's because of Christ, not because of the gifts of the pastor. But what I want you to see – oh, what I want you to see – if you view this place and you say this is where I want to be. "I want to be at Truth Community. I want Truth Community to become my church home. I want to be with these people. I want to serve Christ here in this realm." What I want you to see is that the implications of that are that it means that together we support and we speak with authority, we seek unity in Christ. The thought of being divided against one another is abhorrent and it means that we're willing to step back and lay some things down in order to preserve the unity. Not at the expense of truth, mind you, biblical truth, but we seek unity and we set our minds on Christ's power. If the Lord continues to bless us and we continue to grow, we look at that and we say, "Praise be to Christ. This belongs to him, not to us." You see, what we want at Truth Community are people who share that heart

passion, that heart desire, that heart understanding. We don't want it to be about us because our minds are set on Christ's power.

Fourthly, we satisfy our stewardship. We satisfy our stewardship. Here's what I mean by that, that's your fourth point, the spiritual implications: we satisfy our stewardship. As servants, we do our job with sincere faithfulness. We fulfill the responsibility that Christ has given us until he calls us home. Chapter 4, verse 1 of 1 Corinthians, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy." Lord, if you're going to give us a ministry here, we just want to be faithful to it. We just want to be trustworthy. We just want to do what you've given us to do and be faithful to it and at the end we'll say, "Lord, we were just unworthy slaves. We only did what we ought to have done."

Look over at 2 Corinthians 2. 2 Corinthians comes right after 1 Corinthians for those of you keeping score at home. 2 Corinthians 2, you see the same principle. We just want to serve Christ with sincerity. Verse 17, "We are not like many, peddling the word of God," there are like three sermons that need to be preached on that, right? We are not like those who peddle the word of God and try to make money off of it. "But as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God." Not trying to peddle the newest, latest, spiritual potion of the most recent book. We just want to be sincere servants of Christ and if we can be faithful and sincere servants to Christ, then we're doing something of great, noble, profound, eternal significance because we're doing it at the bidding of the eternal Son of God who purchased these people in Christ with his own blood to be his own possession. And if we can be sincere and faithful in that, then we have identified and pursued a lofty goal with which to devote our entire spiritual energies until Christ calls us home. We just want to satisfy our stewardship, that's all. No one notices. No newspaper articles. No one cares. Because we just want to be sincere with the word of God and watch him work and grow his people and bring others to Christ according to his will.

One final thing: we speak with authority; we seek unity in Christ; we set our minds on Christ's power; we satisfy our stewardship; fifth point, we suffer with patience. We suffer with patience. Look at 2 Corinthians 12 and this is my final passage for this morning. You know, as we say this, we realize that we don't know what the future holds. We don't know what's going to come but we trust the goodness and the wisdom of our Lord Jesus Christ toward us even if serving him brings us hardship. Even if it brings difficulty. Even if it brings blatantly satanic opposition and hardship to us. We trust him and commit ourselves to suffer that with patience. 2 Corinthians 12:7, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me - to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" You see, he's appealing to the authority of the Lord. "Lord, remove this thorn from me. This is unbearable. This really is difficult." And Christ's response is, "No, I'm content to leave that there so that you'll see that my grace is sufficient in your weakness." Paul, having appropriated that lesson, now says in verse 9, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." "You see, I'm just a servant. It's about his authority and his power and what happens to me is incidental. Just so long as Christ is glorified through me, I will be glad and content," he says. That's not just for Paul, that's for me, that's for you, individually and then corporately we look at this and say, "Oh, I start to get it! I'm not an isolated star circling around in the blackness of the universe." We come together, as it were, as a galaxy, as a solar system of believers around the common core, the common Son of the Lord Jesus Christ and all of these things permeate our corporate life as well together. You see, we all share in this mindset that says, "We'll suffer with patience if Christ brings us suffering just so long as he is glorified."

Look at verse 10, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses." Look at it. Look at it. Look at it. Look at the start of verse 10 again, don't miss it, "I am well content. I'm satisfied. I can live here without complaint." Do you see it, beloved? Do you see what the authority of Christ means in the midst of our individual and corporate lives together? It means that I'm "well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." You know, suppose if we lived in a country that just overturned the definition of marriage and wanted to redefine that and all of that and I'd get really upset about...wait, wait, wait. No, I can be well content even in that. I can be well content even in the difficulties that that presents in ministry. I can be well content

because if it makes me feel my weakness, if it makes me conscious of the fact that I'm not in control, if it makes me conscious of the fact that this world is not my home and I'm not comfortable here, I don't fit here, the people in power look at me and say, "You're the problem," when that happens, we suffer with patience. You say, "Well, it's my convictions about Christ that make this difficult, that cause people to insult me. It's for Christ's sake and even though I don't like it and I don't know what to do, I don't know what's going to happen, that conscious weakness is the place of my strength because it turns my eyes up to the authority of Christ, the one who said, 'I will build my church, all authority has been given to me, the one who is coming back, the one who is going to establish righteousness on the earth,' that's where I rest. My citizenship is in heaven and therefore I can suffer with patience without getting worked up, without panic but just I come to the refuge of the authority of Christ who loved me and gave himself up for me."

Do you know what? That's what it means to be a Christian. That's how Christians live. Because that's how Christians live, that's how a church lives. That's what marks the testimony of a biblical church: speaking with authority; seeking unity in Christ; setting our minds on Christ's power; satisfying our stewardship; suffering with patience until Christ calls us home. Beloved, that's not going to get us any earthly applause but you know what? That is the most noble road that any man could walk on the face of the earth, is to walk under the authority of Christ and love him and serve him until he calls us home. When we're talking about a blueprint for a young church, talking about the authority of Christ in the church, that's what we're talking about. That's what we're going to be about.

Bow with me in prayer as we ask the Lord to bless us to that end.

Our Father, we're not interested in Christian fads that come and go. We simply want to serve our great Savior as we grow into the church that you would have us to be. Father, I pray that you would give grace and wisdom to each one of us, to recognize the authority of Christ, to examine our own lives in light of his authority. Father, even in this quiet moment, that we would examine our lives and see if there is an area of unrepented sin in our life that is manifesting rebellion rather than submission to this great Christ. Give us grace to turn from that and to confess it before you and to turn instead to the paths of righteousness once more. Father, for those whose whole heart is in rebellion, that have never been redeemed, Father, may the authority of Christ press upon their hearts so much that they simply bow as Paul did and say, "Yes Lord, I'm a sinner. What would you have me to do? Save me now."

Father, I just ask you again and again and again and again, I pray, O God, that you would sanctify this place, this body of believers that it might become a true church, that it might become what you want it to be. Not about the preferences and the personalities of men but a place where the word of the Lord and the Lord of the word are put forth so faithfully that you could be pleased to bless us in everything that we do and fulfill your purposes for which you have called us into being. We commit these things to you and ask for grace that goes exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think as we seek to be faithful to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.