



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 16:13-18

“The Church of Jesus Christ: Universal and Local”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio Begins] again with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for the privilege that is before us, the privilege of opening the word of God and listening to the voice of the spirit as he teaches us the things that concern our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that each one of us may be open to his teaching. And that the things that we learn may be useful and profitable to us in enabling us to understand what Thy mind and Thy purpose is for us. And Lord, we commit each one present to Thee and ask Thy blessing upon them to the end that the spiritual needs and other needs as well that exist in this room may be met through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. And we ask this in his name and for his sake. Amen.

[Message] Now as I was looking over the list of topics that we have been considering, because one or two of you have not been with us the whole time, just two or three minutes of quick review. Remember that we began with a discussion of the authority and inspiration of the Scripture. And, particularly, as it was seen in the revelation of God in nature and in the word of God. This one work of God, Revelation,

contains two volumes: volume, one nature, volume two, the word of God. And it is through nature and through the Scriptures that we come to understand God.

Then we looked at the eternal trinity and saw that God subsists in a trinity of persons, father, son and spirit; one God, but three persons. Then we went to the Garden of Eden and saw the fall of man, which is really the beginning of all of our troubles. And also the explanation of the situation in which we find ourselves personally and collectively as human beings. Following that, we took a brief look at the Messianic promises of the Old Testament as they represent the divine philosophy of the ages. And we saw that after man fell in the Garden of Eden that God began to unfold to him a Messianic program. That is, a program in which the Messianic revelation was unfolded, which would finally reach its climax in the coming of Jesus Christ who is the Messiah and who is the one who by his work of dying for us upon the cross at Calvary has laid the foundation for God's redemptive program. And it is by means of this redemptive program that the wrongs that exist individually and collectively in this world shall be righted, and only through them. For Jesus Christ is an exclusive Savior and Messiah.

Then we looked at the life of Christ. Very briefly at his birth of a virgin, at his temptation, his baptism, his temptation, his transfiguration, his death and his resurrection. We saw that each one of these events, which are highlights of the greatest life, are redemptive events and have particular significance each related to the Messianic salvation. It is in the death that our salvation is procured. And it is by his resurrection that this is authenticated for men. And every time that we look at the cross we know that redemption has been accomplished. When we look at the resurrection we know that God has accepted the work that Jesus Christ did. It is his paid, which he has stamped over our debt. Jesus Christ having paid that debt for us.

We then looked at the salvation, assurance and safety of the redeemed. And I tried to point out how we can know that we are the children of God and how we can be sure that this salvation that we have is an eternal salvation. It is, of course, really very

simple because the word of God states, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.” And so once we have believed in Jesus Christ and have received this redemption which Jesus Christ has accomplished, then that is a permanent relationship. That is the establishment of a permanent relationship. We have eternal life. Not six months life, not life until we sin, but eternal life. And as our Lord himself has said we shall never perish.

Then we looked at an incident in the life of our Lord in Matthew chapter 14, which when Jesus walked on the water and Peter walked on the water we tried to see that the Christian life is really not an ordinary life at all. It is a life really that no one can live, not even a Christian, apart from supernatural help. In fact, the Christian life is the impossible life. And therefore all of the counterfeits that exist in the world and in the church are basically lies or counterfeits of the life and detract from the glory of God through Jesus Christ. We cannot live this life apart from divine enablement. But with the divine enablement, we are able in the spiritual sphere, as Peter did in the physical sphere, to walk on the water.

And then last time, a couple of weeks ago, we tried to point out that the Christian life is not sugar and spice and everything nice because often the Christian life involves suffering, trials, difficulties, problems, things that we cannot seem to control, but that we should not be discouraged. Our future is secure. And the things that God brings across our paths are often things that are designed to educate us, to build us up in the faith, to strengthen us in the thing that we possess. And, as a matter of fact, sometimes the trials are the only things that will strengthen us in our faith.

Now that brings us tonight to “The Church of Jesus Christ: Universal and Local.” And I want you, if you have your New Testaments, and you ought to have them, to turn with me and listen as I read a few verses in Matthew chapter 16, a passage in which we have for the first time in the New Testament the word “church.” Matthew chapter 16 and

verse 13, “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” By the way, it’s not often that you’re able to find a grammatical error in the King James Version. But if you know your English, you know that we have one here. This should be really, “Who do men say that I the Son of man am?” But [Comment from an audience member] (Good, you have a corrected edition) but, if I say whom, you’ll understand it’s because I’m familiar with this erroneous English. [Laughter] Verse 14,

“And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias (Now, Elias is the New Testament Greek transliteration of Elijah’s name, of course); and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom (or who) say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock (That is the rock of the confession, the truth). Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Now when we begin to talk about the church of Jesus Christ and God’s program through the church, we are of course speaking of something that is of prime significance for us. For we who live in 1968 live in the age of the church. In other words, the church is something that is very close to the heart of God. And it so happens that this is the age in which the church is in existence. And so to talk about the church is to talk about something that is very significant for us.

Now I often hear people say, “I am interested in Christianity, but I do not like churchianity.”

Now, of course, I understand exactly what they mean by that. That is, that they never are disappointed in Jesus Christ, but they often are disappointed in the church. And they're often disappointed in the people who make up the church. And I think that we all would acknowledge that that statement, “I am interested in Christianity, but not in churchianity,” has an appeal that we immediately, I say, recognize. However, if you read the Bible, of course, you will realize that it is thoroughly unscriptural and unbiblical to say, “I am interested in Christianity, but not in churchianity.” For you see, it is obvious that from the time of the beginning of the church through the present age that the church is one of the most significant things in all of the operations of God: past, present and future. In fact, the Apostle Paul calls the church the pillar and ground of the truth.

Now, one of the reasons for this and this misunderstanding is because we have failed to understand just exactly how this term “church” is used in the New Testament. The term “church” is used of all believers in Jesus Christ. But the term “church” is also used of the professing group of believers. And it so happens there is a great deal of difference between the professing Christian church and the church which is the body of Christ. And in this statement, “I am interested in christianity, but I don't like churchianity,” there is a reflection of something which sometimes is not understood, but which is very real. And that is that the church is made up of people who are sinners. And consequently, they could never hope to reach the status in this life of Jesus Christ.

Now I say that this is very interesting. And it is also very important for us to realize that we are living in the age of the church. Unfortunately, many people read the Bible as if all of the texts of the Bible have the same significance.

Now let me hasten to say I believe that all of the texts of the Bible are inspired. I remember one man who tried an audience on their doctrine of inspiration and he said, “How many of you believe John 3:16 is inspired? Raise your hands.” Everybody raised their hand. He said, “How many of you believe Psalm 23, verse 1 is inspired?” And everybody knowing “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want,” they raised their hands.

“How many of you believe the Lord’s Prayer is inspired?” And everybody raised their hand. And then he said, “How many of you believe Isaiah 45:4 is inspired?” And very few people knew what Isaiah 45:4 was. And so very few raised their hands.

Now I believe that all of the Bible is inspired, even that that we’re not familiar with. But at the same time, we are not thereby to think that all of the texts of the Bible have equal relevance to us. Some of the texts of the Bible are written to specific individuals. Some of them are written to entities, such as the nation Israel. And consequently, in reading the Bible we must be sure that we understand to whom the particular text is addressed.

Now I know there are lots of people, I say, that go through the Bible and pick out any text of the Bible and say that is applicable to us today. But that is not true. There are many things that are applicable only to the nation Israel. And some that are written to the church.

Now, as you know, I tried to point out that from the time of Exodus chapter 19 in which we have the law, the age of the law to the time of the cross, we have most of the Old Testament, Exodus 19 to, and on through actually large parts of the gospels. That was the age of the law. And so a great part of the Bible, the largest part of the Bible strictly speaking, is written to individuals who existed under the Law of Moses.

Now we know, of course, that the law was done away with when Jesus Christ died. That’s what the Bible means symbolically when we read that “When Jesus died the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom.” That was God’s way of saying that he was through with the Levitical system now. It had served its purpose. But when the day of Pentecost came and the Holy Spirit came back to the earth, until the day that Jesus Christ comes again and the church goes to be with him we have the church age.

Now great parts of the Bible are addressed to individuals who live in the church age. Now, we live in the church age. Consequently, if we are believers in Jesus Christ those passages that are addressed to believers who live in this age are addressed to us

directly. And they are directly applicable to us. They are applicable to us in a way that many of the texts of the Old Testament are not applicable to us.

Now to illustrate what I mean. Four years ago in Houston a man was married. And just after he was married he was called up for a week of jury duty. And so he conceived of a unique way of getting out of jury duty. When he appeared before Judge Arnold Kretschmer in Houston he quoted a text from the Bible. He said in the light of this text he would like to be excused. He'd just been married and the text reads, “When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.” [Laughter] And according to the associated press, the judge checked the passage and sent him home and excused him from jury duty.

Now if he had been a good Bible student he would have simply said to that young man, “Well, young man, you've quoted me a text that applied to the nation Israel. And if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, and I assume you are you're quoting the Bible that text no longer applies to you. Duty will begin Monday morning (or whenever it is).” [Laughter] So it is important for us that we realize that the texts of the Bible have special significance for us which are addressed to the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the subject of the church is very important.

Now you will notice that in Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18 that Jesus said to Peter, “That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Now I want you to notice that future tense. “Upon this rock I will build my church.” Now he does not say, “Upon this rock I have been building my church.” He does not say, “Upon this rock I am building my church.” But, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” In other words, the church is future from the time of our Lord's earthly ministry.

Now to show you how clearly the New Testament teaches this, will you turn over the Matthew chapter 18 for just a moment and I'm going to give you the only other places in the gospels in which the term “church” occurs. As a matter of fact, the term “church” only occurs three times in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. You've already read one of them.

Now notice verse 17 of chapter 18. Our Lord is speaking of discipline and he says, “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

Now twice the term “church” occurs in Matthew chapter 18 and verse 17. The term “church” does not occur again in the synoptic gospels. In Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18 Jesus refers to the building of the church. In chapter 18 he refers to discipline that shall exist in that church. But just from this, we should know that many theories regarding the church are not correct. For example, there are many who think that the church began with Adam and that all believers from Adam on – and Adam was a believer – are members of the church of Jesus Christ.

Now I think you can see from this that while Adam was a believer and he belongs to the family of God looked at in the broad sense, he is not a member of the church. For the church was not in existence during Adam's day. Many think the church began with Abraham. In fact, this is a very common view. But I think you can see that from this text, the church did not begin with Abraham. It was future from the time of Abraham.

Now Abraham was a very important believer. And we have already talked about the Abrahamic promises. And there is a sense in which we are related to Abraham. For Paul tells us that we are the sons of Abraham by faith, we enter into certain blessings that were given Abraham because of Jewish rejection of them during the present age. But still the church did not begin with Abraham. It did not begin with John the Baptist. For John the Baptist had already come and engaged in his ministry when Jesus said, “I will build

my church.” As a matter of fact, Jesus in the 11th of Matthew makes a distinction between John the Baptist and those who are in the kingdom that he is referring to.

Now the church does not begin with Jesus Christ. In other words, we cannot really say that it began during the ministry of our Lord.

Now I want to show you this. And very quickly I'm going to turn to a series of passages. But this first one, I want you to notice that it is future from the time of our Lord's earthly ministry. Let's turn over to Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 22 and verse 23 because we want to notice one simple fact that the church is the body of Christ. And that will help us to discover when it began. Verse 22 of Ephesians chapter 1, verse 22 and 23.

Now here the Apostle Paul is talking about the ministry of the Lord Jesus and the power that was wrought in his resurrection. In verse 22, do we all have it now? He says, “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

Now the church then is the body of Christ. Now, of course, the church is not the physical body of Christ. That should be obvious. It is the spiritual body of Christ. And this is a lovely term too by the way because you see when Jesus Christ was here in the flesh he carried on his ministry in his body. But now that he has ascended to the right hand of the Father, his body is no longer here. His glorified body is at the right hand of the Father, remember. He has sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and there a new body was formed. This body, not like the body in which he carried out his ministry while he was here on the earth, but this body, a spiritual organism composed of all who believe in him. In other words, the church has the high calling of representing Jesus Christ on the earth. It is to be his body. It is to be his arms, his hands, his feet, his voice. In other words, his ministry continues through the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

Now I mention this just for you to notice that the church is his body. Now if we can discover how we get in the body and when this ministry or this activity was available to men, we will know of course when the church began. So I want you now, if you will,

to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 13. For Paul tells us how we get into the body here. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 13.

Now notice this text. And I wish we had time to talk about all of the things that are found in it. But there is just one major thing I want you to notice. This verse reads, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

Now you will notice that there is no mention of water in this context. But baptism in the spirit is referred to. And also you will notice that reference is made to drinking of one spirit.

Now plainly on the surface the text states that there is a spiritual operation which places us into the body of Christ. “For by one Spirit have we all baptized into one body.”

Now that body, of course, is the church. And it is by the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit that we are brought into the body of Christ. Not the baptizing with water, though baptism with water is a testimony to our salvation and every Christian, of course, should be baptized. But it is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite us to Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul states that and expands it in Romans chapter 6 when he talks about the fact that we have been baptized into the death, the burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He never, by the way, mentions water in Romans 6. It is always the reality that is in his mind, the union that exists between the believer and Christ produced by the Holy Spirit. So then the church is the body of Christ. And the way we enter the body of Christ is through the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Now I think that it should be obvious to all of you here that the way we are baptized, of course, is through faith. It is upon faith that this ministry takes place. But that isn't the thing that I want to stress because I want to stress the time the church began. So let's put the three texts together now. The church's future from the time of Christ, the church is the body of Christ and the church is entered by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Now when did the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit begin? When did this ministry first take place? That will give us the clue to the beginning of the church.

Now you'll take the word baptism and look it up in your concordance and you will not find any reference to this in the Old Testament. And if you look in the gospels at the word baptism you will discover that the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit is always referred to as future.

Now there is a sense in which the work of Christ's death is his baptism. And that is a very real fact. But that is not the baptism of the spirit; that is his own death. It is the spirit who baptizes us into his death which he died for us at the cross. But the baptizing ministry of the spirit is future from the time of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Now will you turn to the first chapter of the Book of Acts for our next text? Oh, I think perhaps before we do that will you look at John chapter 7? Just, we've got a few moments. We can look back here and this text will, I think, also help us. John chapter 7, verse 37 through verse 39. That's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, John, remember. [Laughter] Verse 37, John chapter 7,

“In the last day, that great day of the feast (Now remember this is our Lord's earthly ministry before his death), Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (Now John adds this by way of interpretation,) (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)”

In other words, it is not until our Lord Jesus is glorified that the Holy Spirit is even given.

Now, given means not that he didn't exist. As a matter of fact, he states in the 14th chapter of the Gospel of John that “the Holy Spirit is with you now, but he shall be

in you.” He means his special ministry which begins on Pentecost. In that sense, he has not been given.

Now let’s look at Acts chapter 1, verse 4 and 5. Acts 1: 4 and 5, remember the baptizing ministry of the spirit is future from the time of our Lord’s earthly ministry.

Now we’re going to see that it is future from the time of his post resurrection ministry, his ministry after the resurrection. Notice verse 4.

“And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit (or Ghost) not many days hence.”

Now you can see from this “ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost,” that the baptism of the Holy Spirit has not yet taken place. Our Lord has died. He has been resurrected, but still no baptizing ministry of the spirit, hence, no church yet. But the church has been prophesied and promised as the baptism of the spirit.

Now notice those little words, “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

Now if we had this only, I’m sure that all of us in reading the Book of Acts would say, “Well this baptizing ministry, the only place that it could occur is the day of Pentecost because that was not many days hence. And the primary feature of the day of Pentecost is the coming of the Holy Spirit. That’s when the spirit is given. So surely that must be the baptizing ministry of the spirit.” That would be the normal interpretation, I’m sure, of all of us. But let’s look at the text itself. And so turn to the 2nd chapter of the Book of Acts and let’s read verses 1 through 4. Verse 1 through verse 4, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” There are some people who very mistakenly think if you can get a lot of Christians together in one place

and get them to have all one mind, and I grant you that's a miracle, but anyway that if you could get them to have all one mind that you would have another Pentecost.

Now you often have people who will be engaged in tarrying meetings in which they seek to have again the experiences that the early church had. Well that's just as if we were to all gather at the little hill to the north of the city of Jerusalem and we should expect to see before our eyes again the crucifixion of Jesus Christ again. You see, the coming of the Holy Spirit was a redemptive event that was prophesied in the Old Testament. And it came once and for all on the day of Pentecost. It does not ever come again. Just as his death is only once and for all and just as his second advent is once and for all. And so all of the tarrying in the world with Christians in agreement will not produce again another Pentecost. You see, you are ten thousand miles too far away and two thousand years late. [Laughter] It was then that the Christians met together and prayed. And it was there in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and it must have occurred then that the spirit came. And I'll tell you something else. If nobody had been in the upper room praying, if no one had been in that temple area, not a one, and if they'd all been fighting and squabbling among themselves there, the Holy Spirit would still have come because you see that was prophesied in the Old Testament.

Now I mention this because so many people are confused about simple things like this. This is why a lot of people don't study the Bible too. Because, you see, people seem to make such a hodgepodge of it by failing to observe simple principles of interpretation. Verse 2,

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and (it sat upon the best of them each of them. No it didn't either), it sat upon each of them.”

Did you notice that? Not the best of them, but each of them, every one. In other words, this is the day when every Christian is indwelt by the spirit. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you have the Holy Spirit. You may not have even known it, but you have him indwelling you. You see, the coming of the spirit does not depend upon your goodness, it doesn't depend on your dedication, it depends upon your relationship to the Christ who died upon the cross. If you have trusted him, you have all the benefits of his work. It's all put to your account in the bank of heaven. And the presence of the Holy Spirit is one of your blessings. And you have him indwelling you if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. “Sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Now you'll notice that we've been talking about the baptism of the spirit and it doesn't say that they were baptized with the spirit. It says they were filled with the Holy Ghost. So if you wanted to be real argumentative at this point, you might say, “Well, Dr. Johnson, you said that the church is entered by the baptism of the spirit and the church begins when the baptism of the spirit begins and you suggested it was the day of Pentecost from not many days hence. But it doesn't say here that the baptism of the spirit took place. It says they were filled with the spirit.” Well, I might argue, and it would be correct theology, to say that you cannot be filled with the spirit if you have not already been baptized by the spirit into union with Christ. That should be obvious. And that would be true. But after all, that's a logical theological reason and we always like to find something specifically in the text of Scripture. In the final analysis, if we cannot prove it from the word of God then we ought not to believe it.

So I want you to turn to the 11th chapter now of Acts where we have an interesting statement by a man who was there, a man who was a leader in the things that took place on the day of Pentecost. In fact, this man is the Apostle Peter himself. Later on, you'll remember he is called to the house of Cornelius. And there he preaches the gospel in Cornelius, the gentile's centurion's house. And while he's preaching – as a

matter of fact, before he had even begun to expound the points of his sermon, when he'd just given the introduction the Holy Spirit fell on those who were gathered there because he had made the unfortunate mistake of giving the gospel in his introduction and the spirit said, “Peter, we don't need you any longer now. You've stated the terms of the gospel and that message that you prepared in your long trip up the coast yesterday is worthless. As long as you state the gospel, I can use it.” And you know, while he began to speak the spirit fell on Cornelius and the others who were gathered there and they were converted. And then they were baptized by water.

Now Peter went back to Jerusalem and he stood up to tell what had happened. And this is his account of what happened. Will you notice verse 15?

“And as I began to speak (you see he had just begun, just given his introduction as a matter of fact), as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. (The day of Pentecost). Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.”

In other words, Peter says here that what happened to them is the same thing that happened to us on the day of Pentecost. And that was the fulfillment of Acts 1:5, the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

“Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (notice the condition is belief); what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

Now notice. Let's put it all together very quickly. Jesus said the church would be built from the time of his earthly ministry. It was future. The church is the body of Christ. The body of Christ is entered by the baptism of the spirit. The baptism of the spirit is future from the time of our Lord's post resurrection ministry. The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs on the day of Pentecost, as Peter interprets it in Acts chapter 11, what happened in Acts chapter 2. So here at Pentecost – this arrow means the coming of the spirit – here is the first occurrence of the baptizing ministry of the spirit. And since the church is composed of those who have been baptized by the spirit, the church begins on the day of Pentecost.

Now we should then expect in the Bible, if this be true, that the word “church” should begin to appear. Only three times in all of the synoptic gospels, those three large books, in each case a prophetic reference. But now, will you turn to Acts chapter 5 and verse 11. We're still in Jerusalem and we read after the death of Ananias and Sapphira, verse 11 of Acts chapter 5, “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.” And from Acts chapter 5 and verse 11 on, there is a continuous reference to the church of Jesus Christ.

Now I know that some of you may be thinking about Acts chapter 2 and verse 47 because in our authorized versions it reads, “Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Unfortunately, however, that word “church” is not found in the Greek text at that point. But we don't need it because in Acts chapter 5 those who are believers in Jerusalem are identified as the church. So I think then it should be plain that the church begins on the day of Pentecost. That means it does not begin with Adam. It did not begin with Abraham. It did not begin with John the Baptist. It did not begin with Jesus. It began with the coming of the spirit on the day of Pentecost when the believers were united together in the common possession of the Holy Spirit by his baptizing ministry. He united every one

to Jesus Christ, made them in the sight of God a partaker of his death, burial and resurrection. So the church then began on the day of Pentecost.

Now for a few moments I want to talk to you about what the church is. When we think of the term “church” as I begin tonight I try to make a distinction between the professing church and what is often called the true church.

Now the distinction is a clear biblical distinction. The church, or the term “church,” is used in several ways, but in two primary ways in the New Testament. It is a reference to a local group of believers who meet in a particular place. For example, will you turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 2. “Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth,” in other words, the church local. The group of believers who meet in the city of Corinth having put their trust in Jesus Christ or having made profession of such trust belong to the local church. They are the members of the church, the group of people who confess the name of Jesus Christ. So the term is used in the sense of a local church. The term is also used in the sense of the invisible or spiritual body of believers. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 13 says, “For by one Spirit have we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles.”

Now here we do not have the word “church,” but we’ve already had the identification that the church is his body. And so the church is the group of believers who have been united by Jesus Christ upon faith to him. So that the term “church.” And I think that’s the meaning of the term in Ephesians 1 when we read, “The church which is his body,” he’s referring to the true believers. So let’s just say that the term “church” is used of the local church, people who meet in a certain community and who confess the name of Jesus Christ. By the way, there may be unbelievers in that church. But then the term “church” is used of the group of believers as a whole. All who are in the true church in that church are genuine believers. Whether they be Baptists or Presbyterians or independents or even Roman Catholics. If they have genuinely trusted Jesus Christ and

him alone for their salvation, they belong to the church which is Christ’s body. And consequently, they’re united to us if we are believers. So the term “church” is used in the two senses.

Now it is obvious that the church composed of all the believers in Christ is, from the standpoint of the Bible, something very precious in the sight of God. It’s also obvious, it should be, that the local church is something very precious in the sight of God. In fact, the local church is God’s means to the evangelization and the edification of those who will ultimately be in the family of God from this age in which we are living. Therefore, to say, “I am interested in Christianity and not in churchianity,” obviously is a contradiction of terms because God is interested in the local church.

Now sometimes we don’t get truth unless we also get the negative side. So I’m going to now suggest some ways in which the term “church” is not used in the New Testament and you can test your own concept of the church.

Now the church in the Bible is never used of a building. Did you know that? Have you ever written down your street and you passed your church and you spoke to your friend in your car and say, “Oh, by the way, that’s my church.” Have you ever said that? Did you know you are violating scriptural terminology when you said that? Church is never used of a building. That term is never used of a building. The church is a term that is always used of individuals. It’s used of the collective body. It’s not ever used of a building. As a matter of fact, there is no record that the church had a building to meet in specially devoted to that purpose until the third century. As you know, they began meeting in peoples’ homes like Philemon’s home. The church in Colossae apparently met there. It must have been quite a house to have had a church building in it, if that was the sense in which it was used. This version has one of his most humorous paragraphs in which he discusses the house of Philemon which contained a church within it in the sense in which we often use the term “church.” It is not used of a building.

Now I am not a member of the church of Christ. And I have some very definite disagreements with them on some points of doctrine. But there is one thing which they're correct about. They usually will say on their signs outside their buildings, “The church of Christ meets here.”

Now that's good scriptural terminology. “The church of Christ meets here.” Because that's not the building and that's the point they want to get over. And they're absolutely correct in it. And do you remember too when our forefathers came over do you remember what they called the churches in New England? Remember what they called them? Meeting houses. That's what they called them, the old meeting houses. Go to New England now. You'll see the old meeting houses. And the very fact that we today call buildings churches is an evidence of our decline in spiritual understanding.

Now the church is never used of a denomination, of course, in the Bible. You say, “I'm a member of the Baptist church.” “You are? What's that?” The Bible doesn't say anything about a Baptist church. It never uses the term “church” in the sense of a denomination.

Now those of you that are not Baptists remember it's not used of the Presbyterian church either or of the Anglican or anything else. And it's never used of a state church too. We say the Church of Scotland. You'll never find the Church of Greece or the Church of Palestine. You might find the churches in Judea, the church at Colossae, the church in Corinth. But not the Corinthian church in the sense of a state church or even a city state church.

Now I think it should be obvious from this that – oh there is one other thing too. The Bible never speaks of church membership. Did you know that? In the sense of a membership role. Did you know that? Because, you see, the moment that a person believed in Jesus Christ he was already enrolled in the church. There was no need to be enrolled in anything else or when you put your trust in Jesus Christ you are enrolled in the body of Christ. And the local church which met in a community was simply the

group of believers in that community who had been enrolled in the church universal. And so consequently, there was no membership role. That’s why I don’t believe – now this is one of by aberrations from the customs of some Christians – that’s why I don’t believe in a membership role.

Now I believe in membership. And I think the elders of every church should know who is in the church and who isn't. In fact, they should know day by day who is and who isn't. I mean they should be that acquainted with the flock because it is their responsibility to shepherd them. But as far as a membership role, it’s not found in the New Testament and you’ll never get me to put my name on a church role ever. Once I learned that from the Scriptures, I intend to live by it. Not follow, not put my name on any local church role, although I believe in membership. In other words, this is the way in which the Scriptures present it.

Now I don’t want to step on any of your toes. It’s just one of my peculiarities. Paul and I have the same. [Laughter] This is all going on tape too, unfortunately. [Laughter]

Now just for a few moments let me mention a few things before we look at the end of the church that I think that we need to bear in mind. Because, unfortunately, like most things that man touches, the church has been touched by our failure to understand the New Testament doctrine. And I want to draw a series of contrasts between the apostolic churches and the present day churches. And you just see if most of these things are not true. Perhaps they’re not true of your church, your particular one. But I believe you will agree that they are true of most of our Christian churches today, our professing Christian churches.

The early church believed and loved the principle of the grace of God. They lived by grace. They preached salvation by grace. They believed that believers became believers by simply accepting what Jesus Christ did for them. They understood that salvation was a free gift. They preached it as a free gift. And furthermore, they lived

under grace. They did not live under law, not under the Ten Commandments, nine of which however are repeated as exhortations in the New Testament, but they did not live under the commandments for they realized that the law had been done away with in the cross of Christ.

Today our church is a church that is frequently legalistic, legalistic in its method of salvation. For we are often told that the way to become a Christian is by doing the best we can, doing good works, being a good citizen in the community, or observing the ordinances or trying to do the best we can, all of which are simply legalistic ways of trying to make points with God as if he's going to be impressed by our goodness which is always touched by our sin.

In the early church every believer was a priest of God. That is, every believer had the right to go directly to God and bring his petitions to God. They met as a company of priests and they observed their priesthood together. In fact, the priesthood of every believer was one of the cardinal doctrines of the reformation period. And the Presbyterian church and the Methodist church and the Lutheran church, the churches of the reformation, are churches that in their beginning came into existence because they believed that the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer was a significant doctrine.

Today we have an unscriptural distinction between the clergy and the laity, as if they're two classes of Christians, one, the preachers and the other, the average person. And so we have the laity and the clergy. That is a distinction that is not justifiable from the standpoint of Scripture. It is not found anywhere. There are some Christians who have gifts of utterance that other Christians do not have. Some are teachers, some are evangelists, some are pastor-teachers. But in the sight of God every believer is a priest and every believer stands upon the same foundation. And therefore that means that you have a right to go to God directly, not through your preacher.

Now I say this because being a teacher of the word I often have people come to me and say, “Lewis, will you pray for me about so and so?” Sometimes I say, “Why don't

you pray about it?” Then they’ll say, “Oh, I am praying about it, but I feel that your prayers are answered better than mine.” I would say, “Why?” And of course there’s no reason why. And then I try to use that as an occasion to point out to them that their access to God is precisely the same as mine. And as a matter of fact it might be better than mine because I might be out of fellowship with God at that moment, whereas you might be in fellowship. Because I know preachers, [Laughter], being one myself.

Everyone is a priest, a distinction between clergy and laity as if to suggest that one is first class Christian and the other second class is not found in the Bible. In the New Testament churches they gave as God prospered them. They gave as they had been blessed by God. They gave proportionately to their blessings. They did not give a tithe. Does that shock you? Have you ever bothered to look at the New Testament and what it has to say about tithing? I think you would be very, very surprised. You would discover that a lot of wool has been pulled over your eyes. [Laughter] You will discover – nine o’clock think of that [Laughter] – you would discover that tithing is an Old Testament legal practice. It was Israel’s income tax. Everybody had to give ten percent. The Old Testament speaks about tithes and offerings.

Now in the New Testament you will discover that the only references to the word tithe are references such as our Lord’s reference. And he lived in the age of the tithe remember, for he lived in this period of time when the tithe was still valid as an income tax. And then afterwards there’s a reference made in Hebrews to the tithe that Abraham paid Melchizedek way back here before even the law began. And did you know that in the New Testament there’s no reference anywhere to the church being responsible to tithe? Did you know that? Have you ever looked at your church literature? Do you know where they go for texts to support tithing? Malachi. Just as if that boy quoted that text in Deuteronomy to the judge. Just as valid.

Now there are lots of people who say, “Oh, alright Dr. Johnson, I’ll grant that, but if the Old Testament saints gave ten percent why shouldn’t I give ten percent?” Well, of

course, I'd like to point out that that was not a gift. That was a tax. You may say, “Well, my church makes me feel like it's a tax.” [Laughter] Alright, but I want to ask you another question. Why shouldn't you give fifteen percent? Why shouldn't you give twenty percent? Why just ten? Or if things are going for the bad, why should you give ten percent? Perhaps you're having a hard time. Perhaps you can only give five percent. Or perhaps you cannot give anything at all. You don't have it to give. Should you have a guilty conscience? No, not according to the New Testament; the New Testament giving is voluntary. It is out of gratitude. It is as God has prospered us. And consequently, that giving in its amount is left up to the individual and the Holy Spirit.

Now you think the church will suffer? No, it will never suffer. I know from personal experience. I've been pastor of two churches. I'm not pastor of one now, but I've been associated with it. Now this is about seventeen years we've never owed a cent in any church in which I've ever been associated. Do you know why? Because the grace of God is preached; and men are exhorted to receive the free gift of God through Jesus Christ. And when they see what God has really done for them they give because they're grateful. And that's the way God wants us to give. Because we're grateful for what he's done for us. And the church will not lack anything if the hearts of the people have been touched by the grace of God.

Well, time's up. We cannot continue. I have two or three more things to say about this. But I'll just save it until next time. And I also wanted to talk about what's going to happen when Jesus Christ comes and the church is called up. But actually our next topic we can probably insert that without too much difficulty if we don't run across another hot topic like this one. [Laughter] So next Friday night we will pick it up at this point. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of studying together. We pray that the word of God may be our guide in our Christian life and testimony. Enable us,

Lord, to so read the Scriptures that as a result of the pondering of them and the ministry of the spirit to us, Christ may be glorified through obedience to them. Lord, we know that there is so little that we do that is in complete accord with Thy word and we beseech Thee through the spirit to bring us to a deeper devotion to Jesus Christ and a more intimate and complete obedience to him. May Thy blessing rest upon each one present here. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now we have a minute to two for questions if you'd like to ask some questions, why fire away. Yes, ma'am?

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Fifty days after the crucifixion. Pentecost means, remember, fifty days. I should say fifty days from the resurrection because there was three days from the crucifixion to the resurrection. But Pentecost means fifty. And consequently, you remember he taught the disciples for forty days and then he ascended. And then there was ten days between the ascension and the day of Pentecost, so fifty in all. He was crucified on Friday, he rose on Sunday, taught them for forty days the things concerning the Kingdom of God, Luke said, ascended ten days later the spirit came in fulfillment of the promise of Joel chapter 2. Yes, sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well, not necessarily. But of course that would apply to that too. But what I really had in mind was the fact that many people have felt down through the years that the only way in which we can as Christians obtain the presence of the Holy Spirit is to go through the same experiences that they went through. In other words, we should

gather in a room, be of one accord and pray for the coming of the spirit, and he will come to us. So that the Holy Spirit's coming is a second work of grace after our faith. But John 7 states that when we believe in Jesus Christ the spirit comes, as also Acts chapter 11, Ephesians chapter 1 and other places.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] No I do not believe in speaking in tongues today. I believe that speaking in tongues was a temporary gift given to the apostles to confirm the message that they were preaching. In other words, it was a miraculous gift. Just like the gift of miracles and the gift of healing. All those were miraculous spiritual gifts. They were given as Hebrews chapter 2, verse 4 and 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 21, 22 says to the apostles in order that the message that they preached to unbelieving Jews might be authenticated. Because you see what happened on the day of Pentecost was something that was quite strange to the Jew. Because here began a movement in a sense outside of Judaism, which ultimately became a gentile movement predominately. And God had spoken for centuries through the Jews. And they knew it. The Old Testament stated that his revelation came through Jews and would go through Jews to the gentiles. And so here is a group outside of Judaism that claims to have divine authority. So it was necessary for God to give miraculous gifts in order to confirm the message that they were preaching. That's why speaking in tongues took place. And you'll notice in every case in which it is given in the Book of Acts, there are three places, Jews were present. It was a message that was directed toward them, the unbelieving Jews. And as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14, he says, "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people (that is Israel); yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."

In other words, speaking in tongues was a sign of the blessing of God upon this Christian movement. But it was a sign to unbelieving members of this people. Consequently, it's a temporary gift.

Now church history has born that out because from the time of shortly after the apostolic age to the nineteenth century there is no historical evidence of anyone ever speaking in tongues or even claiming to.

[Comment from the same audience member] [Laughter]

[Johnson] That's all I think it is. [Laughter] As a matter of fact, you know the Bible never says unknown tongues. The speaking in tongues which they engaged in was speaking in known languages. As you remember on the day of Pentecost they said, “How hear we every man in our own tongue, in which we speak?” And, so what it was was the gift of being able to speak a known language, not an unknown language.

Now unknown is used throughout quite a few of the places in the New Testament in which the reference to this gift occurs. But if you'll look in each one of the cases it's in italics, which means that the word unknown is not found in the original text.

Now, people often say, “Well then what is this that goes on today?” Well, of course, I don't think it's a genuine thing. And I would not say that it is all of Satan. I think a lot of people are misled. They don't know. They've been told by someone that they respect that this is a New Testament phenomenon.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] I think some of it is that. I think some of it is a genuine desire on the part of people who have a deeper spiritual experience, but they don't have any opportunity to study the word of God or to be taught the word of God by someone that

knows something about the Scriptures. And so they seek for experience instead of seeking to know God’s word. It’s a very earnest and sincere thing on the part of some. On the part of others, it is satanic, because it’s a way to mislead people.

[Question from the audience] [Laughter]

[Johnson] It’s gibberish. It’s gibberish. Well, yes, I’m of course – I wouldn’t want to pose as an authority on all of the types of speaking in tongues. But many of the so called speaking in tongues have been examined by linguistic experts and they are no known languages at all. They are patterns of gibberish. That’s all. And it’s psychosomatic.

There’s some very nice people that have been involved in this movement in recent years. And it’s, I believe they are misled. They have not been taught the Scriptures on these points. They cannot understand how it is that any spiritual gift should be temporary. But the answer is very simple. Do we have any apostles today? Apostles were spiritual gifts. Why should we not have apostles then? Do we have anyone raising people from the dead today? This is what I would like to say to every so called healer. If you just raise a couple of people from the dead, I’m willing to become a member of your organization, [Laughter] whatever it is. But they never can do that. It’s always something that can be explained another way. I’ve attended healing meetings and I know. And I’ve heard them call out, “I sense by the spirit of God that there is someone in this audience that has cancer.” Well, when there’re a thousand people there and the great majority are over fifty years of age, well you know that you’re going to strike fire. “I sense that there is someone here who has lung trouble.” And so on. And I’ve also seen some healings too, so called.

I was in Pittsburgh a few years back and Katherine Koolman was well known in that area has a large meeting in the middle of the bay. A thousand people were present.

And they were largely older people. But we went, another preacher and myself, we went and sat up in the balcony. This boy was from Pittsburgh, he said, “I don’t know how they do it, but they’ll spot us as preachers.” [Laughter] And so we went in, we went up in the gallery and sat down. And I noticed one of the ushers kept looking over at us. [Laughter] And finally he came over to us and he said, “This your first time here?” I said, “Yes.” He said no I’ve been here before. He said, “Are you preachers?” [Laughter] And then he went on to talk about his experience. And he was turned a little sideways to me and he told us about his healing experience and how this had meant so much to him. And then he turned around – and I’m saying this, I don’t mean to detract from this man in any way, he was perfectly sincere – but he was a one eyed man.

Now I thought, “Well, now how can someone be so fooled by this?” Then later on Katherine called up several to the platform and one man came up with his crutches. And she prayed over him and then took his crutches away from him and there was about five steps from the platform down to the floor of the building and he started down those steps. And if had not been for two men to catch him he would have fallen flat on his face. And they had to take him out. But she had pronounced him healed and taken away his crutches. And later on after the meeting we saw him taken away with his crutches.

Now this is the kind of thing that goes on in many of the places. But people just are not willing to believe what the word of God states or not willing to search it out. It’s sad. It’s very sad. Any other questions? Okay.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] It’s very easy really. [Laughter] All you have to do is start attending.

[Comment from the same audience member] [Laughter]

[Johnson] Now what is your last name? [Laughter] Are you a member of the Dunlap family?

[Comment from the same audience member] [Laughter]

[Johnson] Do you have a family role? [Laughter]

[Comment from the same audience member] [Laughter]

[Johnson] A family role. [Laughter]...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]