



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Timothy 1:16

"The Local Church: Its Organization"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The apostle writes, "It is a trustworthy statement, if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." Now, let me make one comment, I may forget to do this when we get to the organization of the local church. The term office is not found in the original text here. It is an attempt to translate a Greek word which means something like "oversight" and not office of overseer. Verse 2,

"An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond

reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory."

Our subject for tonight, as those of you who have the notes know, is "The Local Church" our first study in it entitled "Its Organization." Let me just briefly review, singling out the important points that we have studied in our two sessions so far on the doctrine of the church. After a brief consideration of the nature of the church, including a study of the usage of the term church in the Bible, we turned to the subject of the birth of the church. We have concluded from our study so far that the term church, which finds its principle definition from the New Testament, refers to both the local church and the universal church. And by universal church we mean the whole body of believers. By local church, we mean, of course, a group of believers who meet regularly in one locality. We'll have more to say about that in just a moment.

I have given you in the notes just a couple of Scripture references to support both these things. There are many more that we could have put for both of them. The functions of the church in the world we saw to be ministry to outsiders, to insiders, that is to those who are not believers and then those who are believers, for the ministry of the church is to itself in edification. And even to the angelic world. It's an amazing thing when you think about it, but it is by means of the church that God says he desires to

make known his manifold wisdom to principalities and powers and heavenly places. I'm not sure if the angels could really learn anything much from us except what not to do rather than what to do. But still that is the apostle's word in Ephesians 3:10. And so they are learning something, no doubt, about the grace of God as they perceive what he does in individual lives.

Last time we laid stress upon the fact that the birthday of the church was the day of Pentecost. And we tried to show that one enters into the church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit that that baptism of the Spirit did occur on the Day of Pentecost and from that time the church had its beginning. We saw the Lord Jesus promised that he would build his church, not that he had been building it as if were an Old Testament body of believers, or that he was in the process of building during his earthly ministry as if he began it then. But he said, "On this confession, that I am the Messiah, the Son of the living God, I will build my church."

We saw that the term church only occurs three times in the whole of the gospels. And those three times are in the Gospel of Matthew. Once in chapter 16, verse 18, and then again in chapter 18, in once verse twice, in which reference is made to discipline within this future body that he had promised in chapter 16, verse 18.

Now, in this study we want to begin a more detailed study of the local church. And this will largely be our subject from now on in our study of Ecclesiology, with the exception of our last study in which we study the future of the church. The importance of this aspect of this general subject Ecclesiology is surely now quite clear, but let me just mention again some of the reasons why it is important that we study the doctrine of the local church. I do not think that we can really say from the Bible that the primary purpose of God in this age is the building of the church. I don't know that that is really specifically stated. Now, the reason that I am saying that I don't know that you can know that is because a lot of people do say that. They do say that the church is the primary purpose of God in this age.

I do think it is one of the primary purposes, and to that extent we can go along with the importance of the church in this age. Surely when our Lord says, "I will build my church," and then when we read the Book of Acts and see the importance laid upon the local bodies of believers as the gospel went out over Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, and then add to that the ministry of the Apostle Paul who wrote to the churches and conclude with the Book of Revelation in which our Lord gives again seven messages to the churches. You surely can say it is one of the primary purposes of God in this present age. So the local church is important and we should never discount the importance of the local church. That's often done.

I remember in the sixties when things were so interesting for us old people and so interesting for some of you young people in the audience. We were treated to views of things that were happening in places like Berkley, California. We would see signs on the television screen; some of the young people had them up, "Jesus Yes, Christianity No." Well, I think we could understand that. That was there stress upon the fact that what they saw in organized Christendom was not so good, but they didn't know anything that they could say against the Lord Jesus. Sometimes you have Christians saying, "The important thing is not Churchianity, but Christianity." Now, this kind of disjunction between Christianity and churchianity, now of course if you mean churchianity just playing at church, then of course we understand that that is not something that the New Testament is very favorable to. But if we are trying to play off Christianity as over against stress on the church, that disjunction is not in the Bible at all. If we are going to be true to Christianity, we must have, as a very important part of our Christianity life, a relationship to the local church. I don't mean our names on a roll. I mean that the local church should loom large in our own life and thinking. The building of the church is important in the sight of God. It's important in the sight of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And it should be important to us.

The work of Christ is directly related to the local church. We read, for example, in Acts chapter 20, verse 28, a passage that I think we will probably look at later on, because it has to do with the appointment of elders by God. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." And there great stress rests upon the fact that the church has come into existence by the purchase of God. And then in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 25 read that the Lord Jesus loved the church and gave himself for it. So the local church is directly related to the work of our local church in redemption. It is also the "pillar and support of the truth," as we have just read in our Scripture reading. What is meant by that is the local church is the defense of the body of the truth. It is from the local church that the defense of the truth of God should proceed.

Now, of course, if the defense of the truth rested ultimately upon the local church we would be in a bad way. But God has determined that the tools, the means by which his truth is defended in the present day, the means is the local church. It is the pillar and the ground of the truth. And those words mean exactly what I am saying when I am expounding this. It does not mean that the church is that upon which the truth stands. But the church is the bulwark of it in that she is commissioned to defend that truth. That's why we have classes like this in Believers Chapel, because we are anxious to see you become able to defend the doctrines of the Christian faith or the truth. So the church is important because it is the defense of the truth. And Paul, of course, suffered many things for the church and considered his greatest sin the persecution of the church. I suggest you look up some of the passages that I have near the bottom of page one of lecture number three.

But what is a local church? Occasionally you will have, well a theological student probably is responsible for this, but occasionally you will have someone say, "But what is a local church?" Because we talk about the church and we often do not defend our definitions or even offer definitions. And so I want to begin with a definition and I assure

you it is not inspired. It is simply something that I have manufactured myself. I didn't create it, remember only God is creative. But this is what seems to me a fairly good representation of a definition of the local church. A local church is a congregation of professing believers, professing because it is possible for those who do not really possess Christ to be in a local church. That seems evident from several places in the New Testament. A local church is a congregation of professing believers in Christ. Incidentally, if you don't profess to believe in Christ then the New Testament says you're not a local church. That's why a Unitarian meeting is not a church in the biblical sense. They do not believe in the deity of Christ. They do not believe in the trinity. And while they like to trade on the Christian truth of the church by saying "the Unitarian church" they are not a church according to the biblical teaching. The Mormon church is not a church according to the biblical teaching, for the same reasons.

The church is a congregation of professing believers in Christ, that is in Christ as the Son of God, coequal with the Father and Spirit, meeting regularly in one locality under the oversight of elders. A group of students at SMU who every Friday night gets together and study the Bible together are not a local church. They are a group of people who meet and study the Bible, but they are not a local church. The text that says, "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst" is in the context of discipline. And what he is simply saying is that when the church gathers together, be it a very small church, the power of God in discipline is there, so people that gather together in one locality regularly just to study the Bible they are not a church. The church is composed of believers in Christ who meet regularly in one locality under the oversight of elders. Now, it is possible to have a church without elders. Because when the apostles founded the earliest churches, they were founded without elders. But he quickly, after they had been founded, went out and appointed elders in them. So there was a transitional stage in the local church, and so what we are seeing in this definition, I think, is the ultimate of the mind of God, a local church should have the oversight of elders.

With deacons and gifted men, now the gifted men are not necessarily elders or deacons, but they might be. The gifted men are the men with gifts of utterance. I am speaking particularly of that, though all believers, of course, have spiritual gifts, some of utterance and some of other forms, non-utterance gifts. But now, this last clause is important, observing the ordinances and continuing in the apostles' doctrine, so a group of people who meet together regularly in once locality to study the Bible, not a church. But if they should have elders and deacons, and if they should observe the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism, then they would be a local church. Of course, we assume they continue in the apostles' doctrine. That's important.

Now, let's turn to I, the fact of local church organization. It is probably best to speak of organization in the churches, as I suggest, since the universal church has no visible organization, and the church on earth has no denomination or relationships authorized by the Bible. Now, let me say right at the beginning I do not think that the Bible teaches any such thing as a denomination. I do not mean by this that every denomination is an unbelieving instrument. That is not true. But so far as the Bible is concerned, there is no support for division within the body of Christ. And it is my own personal opinion, and I don't say that this is the most important truth in the world, but it is my own personal opinion that when we are members of a denomination we are, strictly speaking, in a position in which we are denying the oneness of the body of Christ. So that if we are Baptists we are saying that we are a part of the body of Christ. If we say that we are Presbyterians, we are dividing the body. If we say that we are Episcopalians, we are dividing the body. I think that it is best for us to be members simply of the body of Christ and not take to ourselves denominational names.

On the other hand, the local churches ideally are not independent. Now, what I mean by that that there is some organization or hierarchy over the local churches that are scriptural. There was no organizational hierarchy over the churches of the New Testament. But you could not say that they were independent churches, because they

were interrelated with one another. The unity that they had was manifest in the fact that they had common doctrine and common practice, and they were the common product on the human level of the ministry of the apostles and their associates. So they were not independent churches in the sense that they had no relationship with others. One of the evidences of that is when one man traveled from one locality to another in the early days of the church; he took a letter of commendation. So that the church in Jerusalem, if a man was a member of it, they would send a letter with him if he went to the church at Antioch commending him to the fellowship of the saints in Antioch. That's not a bad practice at all. And it certainly can be carried out today. It indicated that there was a fellowship of unity and doctrine of practice that existed in the local church. They recognized that they were all members of the universal church. So they didn't conceive of themselves as being independent in the sense of no relationship to others. But they were independent in the sense that they did not have any hierarchy over them. They were not ruled by any other body.

Capital A, the proof of organization. There are evidences of organizations in the New Testament churches such as the church had officers who cared for the ministry and work of the church. I'm going, for the sake of time, to not read all of the Scripture references, because we could not finish if we read them all. I suggest that you do look up these passages, because I do think they support these contingents that are made by the Arabic numbers one through five. The church had officers who cared for the ministry and work of the church. And second, the church met at appointed times. That passages, Acts chapter 20, verse 7 says, "On the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread." So evidently it was their custom to meet on the first day of the week. The apostle refers to that in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, too. He speaks about the first day of the week as the time when they would lay by themselves certain monies, which they gave for the work of the Lord through the church. So the church met at appointed times.

I think I mentioned in our Sunday message the fact that they met on the first day of the week, because it was the day of the resurrection. It was the day when our Lord appeared to them. John chapter 20 mentions several of these appearances, and they were on the first day of the week. So associated with the first day of the week was the resurrection. And since the early church believed very strongly in the risen Christ, it was natural for them on the pattern of his appearance to them, since he met with them in the local bodies as they met. He's the one who walks in the midst of the lamp stands the Book of Revelation says. It was only natural then that they should begin to meet on the first day of the week; great testimony to the resurrection of Christ, because these Jewish men had for generations been meeting on the seventh day, not the first day. So the very change itself marked a confession of faith on their part. The church met at appointed times.

Third, the churches exercised discipline. Discipline goes with order, organization. So they exercised discipline in order that the meetings not become chaotic, and the life of the church not become chaotic. Now, they could not prevent someone from standing up in the meeting and saying something that was out of order. That is evident, because the apostle gives instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5. He says, "Despise not prophesyings." Evidently some had gotten up and said some things that some of the people did not like. And he warned them, "Do not despise prophesyings, but prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." So evidently people were saying things that weren't so good in the meeting. And their responsibility was not to quench the Spirit, but allow the manifestation of the gifts, but get to the place where you could prove all things by the word of God and hold fast to that which is good.

Now, if chaos came to the meetings because of the utterances of some, it was the responsibility of the elders to do something about it. And so in our meetings here, for example, if our meetings should become chaotic because individuals get up and say things that are totally improper, it is the responsibility of the elders to say something

about it. Little errors here and there are to be expected, because we are all in different stages of spiritual growth, and we should be able to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. Occasionally people rush to an elder and say, "Did you hear what he said in his message? What about that sentence so and so?" Somebody said something not so long ago, and I happened to be thinking about something else when he said it. And my wife said to me afterwards, "Did you hear what he said?" And I said, "No, I didn't." "Well, he said such and such." Well just because a person says such and, incidentally she didn't say I should do something about this, but I'm using this as an illustration. It's possible for a person to get up and say something that really is contrary to the word of God. But we don't have elders jumping up in the meeting all the time and saying, "Wait, that's wrong. That sentence right there, cross that out." [Laughter] We should have a maturing congregation in which we are able to judge the things that are said and hold fast to the good and eliminate the things that are bad. If it becomes serious and the saints are really effected by it, that's another matter. It is the elders' responsibility to say something about it.

Fourth, the churches regulated their meetings. The Apostle Paul gives instructions in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 about the exercising of spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, using the gift of prophecy. They were to be done decently and in order. And that is a reflection of organization in the local church.

And finally, the churches collected and dispensed money. The collection and dispensing of the money in the early church was primarily the historical occasion of sending money to the poor in Jerusalem. We, of course, realize that that was probably simply a pattern of the kind of work that they engaged in. But it does indicate that there was organization in the local church. There are probably many other things that would indicate organization. I've just listed five things that came immediately to my mind.

Let's turn now to the major contending church polities. Among Protestants, for the sake of simplicity we'll not say anything about the Roman Catholics and the Greek

Orthodox and some of the others, but we will limit ourselves to some things concerning the Protestants. Among Protestants, the following are the major forms of church government. And first of all, Episcopalian church polity or Episcopal church polity. We could probably say that the dominating principle in Episcopalian church polity is the autocratic principle. This system is built upon a three-fold division in hierarchical order, bishops, priests or presbyters, and deacons.

And the central feature is the office of bishop. The bishop in Anglican polities stands in apostolic succession. That is his lineage is to be traced back to the apostles. As you know, in the Roman Catholic church the Pope's lineage, he's the bishop of the church at Rome; his lineage is traced back to the Apostle Peter, who was the first bishop of Rome according to their church polity. In Anglican or Episcopalian polity apostolic succession is generally claimed. Sometimes you will find that only a connection with the historic episcopate is claimed and not apostolic succession. But in the Anglican church the official position has been that the bishops stand in apostolic succession. Some however, are not so sure of succession and then speak, as I've said, of the historic episcopate.

The bishop is empowered to appoint other bishops and to ordain priests and deacons. Incidentally, in the recent split in the Episcopalian church in this country, one of the questions that arose and still is before them is the proper ordination of some of the bishops of the new church. And they have been ordained, but according to the laws they had to have a certain number of bishops present to ordain other bishops and they did not have enough bishops present to ordain them. Some had agreed to come to ordain them who didn't come, but they went ahead and ordained the bishops anyway. Well, that probably is recognized as a very serious thing in Episcopalian circles. In my circles it's not too important. But nevertheless in theirs it's probably a very important thing. The bishop was one who appointed other bishops and ordained priests and deacons.

The office of bishop arose shortly after the apostolic age, probably out of a desire for unity of doctrine and discipline. Incidentally, this is a rather important point for

Episcopalianism. Almost all of modern Episcopalian scholars acknowledge that the Episcopacy is not a New Testament doctrine at all. Bishop Lightfoot, one of the greatest of the Episcopalian scholars of the Church of England plainly acknowledged that the office of bishop as the Episcopalians believed that office exists in their church is not in the Bible. They acknowledge that it arose shortly after the time of the apostles. And they justify it not as a scriptural thing but as I've mentioned here as having proven to be necessary because of the history of the local church. There was a necessity for unity of doctrine and discipline, and by virtue of appointing a man over a number of churches they attained to a unity of doctrine and a unity of discipline. The identity of the office of bishop and elder we shall speak about in a moment, but it is now acknowledged by almost all students of the New Testament and especially those in the Anglican community, many of whom are very fine scholars. The defense of the system, I say, is usually based on the idea that it arose as a necessary development of the life of the church. Others say it's not development, it's departure from the New Testament truth. That happened to be my opinion, too. In the Episcopalian system authority is vested in the bishop, in the diocese and in the house of bishops, generally speaking in the Episcopalian church in this country.

The second form of church polity is Presbyterian church polity. If Episcopalian church polity may be characterized as autocratic in its nature, Presbyterianism is characterized as being representative in its system. Presbyterianism is a representative system of government by a body of men called elders. The Greek word is presbuteros, which means literally "an old man" or an elder. The next line incidentally, the third line where I have considered a synonym bishop, you should insert the little proposition of, considered a synonym of bishop, episcopos. According to the Presbyterian, I think they're right, the bishop is the elder and the elder is the bishop, these two terms are synonymous.

The elders, according to Presbyterianism are of two characters, ruling. All elders are ruling elders, but some are also teaching elders. Let me read you the passage upon which this is based. I do think this is justifiable, too, myself. 1 Timothy chapter 5, and verse 17, the Apostle Paul writes here in some words that have importance for elders. "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." Or especially those who labor in the word and doctrine the Authorized Version renders it. Now, notice he mentions, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor." That is, not only that they have honor, but that they be given financial support for some of the elders in the local church devoted themselves completely to the ministry of the local church. They may have had some work on the side that they carried out. They may have been a carpenter or some kind of professional worker, but they gave a lot of their time to the local church. And the apostle says, if they have ruled well, they should be worthy of double honor, financial remuneration. I think that's what it means. But we cannot be dogmatic about that. "Especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." so some of them were engaged in teaching as well as ruling. It's on this basis that we say that there were two kinds of elders. All elders were ruling, but some might be called teaching elder. And I assume that that means that they had the gift of teaching or the gift of pastor teacher, which would, I think, qualify for this description of them.

According to Presbyterianism men are elected to office by the people and become their representatives. So in a Presbyterian church the congregation elects their elders. Now, there are some limitations to this, but generally speaking that is the way it is done. So the sheep elect their shepherd in the Presbyterian church. That in itself ought to tell you that it's probably not scriptural. Now, we do not have any indication in the New Testament of any congregation of believers electing their elders or leaders, but that is the way that it is done in the Presbyterian church. And on top of the local organization in Presbyterianism there exists a graduated system of church courts.

Now, for those of you have grown up in the Presbyterian church you probably understand immediately what I am speaking about. But in the local areas there is a presbytery composed of lay elders and the ministers of the churches who meet in a local presbytery and carry on presbytery business. Theoretically they have charge over the churches. Then there is a synod, usually state wide, in which ministers come and others come for a wider body and a wider discipline. And finally once a year the general assembly of the church meets. The local churches, and the presbyteries, and others sending representatives both of the teaching elders and the ruling elders and that is the ultimate court of the denomination, and all decisions made there are required to be carried out by every local church; Presbyterianism, a representative form of government, so they claim.

And third, congregational church polity. Congregational church polity is democratic in its nature. When we think of Congregational church polity we think primarily of Baptist churches in this part of the country, because they are congregational in their government. In Congregationalism autonomy exists in the local church. Now, I said ideally with an exclamation point, because anyone who has ever been in a situation like this knows that there are various ways by which comities of the convention can exercise forms of control. But ideally the local church has autonomy, and therefore the churches are democratic is government. Two types of leaders are recognized, the pastor and the deacons. Some of the churches also have trustees who have responsibilities with regard to the property. The pastor is the elder in the church.

In a Baptist church, now there are of course some differences of opinion, but I'm speaking without going into great details. In general, in a Baptist church the elder is the pastor. Now, you can see that this makes for an autocratic form of government if this should be carried out to its logical conclusion, because discipline is committed into the hands of the elders. And if there is one elder in the local church, he had disciplinary power, and so he is a ruler of the whole congregation by definition. In practice, this is

not too often carried out; however, there are some who have sought to do it. The deacons are elected by the congregation and they exercise the oversight over the life of the body. "This theory of popular government," Berkoff says, "making the office of the ministry all together dependent on the action of the people is certainly not in harmony with what we learn from the word of God." Now, we want to test these systems as we go through our study of Ecclesiology. So we will leave it at that for the moment.

Capital C, the principles of scriptural church organization and authority. The leading features of scriptural church organization and polity and authority are these, and I think they are so obvious that I will pass them by simply reading them. First of all, in the local church Jesus Christ is the head. The headship of Jesus Christ in the local church is of great importance. The authority rests ultimately with him. Secondly, authority rests with the word and the Spirit, the word of God and ultimately as the Holy Spirit teaches the word of God to the saints, and finally, with the elders of the local body. I hasten to say that this authority of the elders is derivative and representative. That is, they are under shepherds under Christ, subordinate to that of the Lord and the Spirit, subordinate to the word of God. It is possible for the elders to be wrong, of course. It is possible for them to disobey the Lord. And so, the ultimate authority rests with the Lord, with the word, with the Spirit, and the elders are responsible, too, to remember that, but they are the representatives of the Lord, and we are to yield to them subjection as long as they are in harmony with the word of God. The pattern of the subjection of a wife to a husband is that kind of pattern. The wife should be subject to the husband as long as he is subject to the word of God. And we ought to obey the state as long as the state is in harmony with the word of God. We should obey elders as long as they're in harmony with the word of God. But when the elders get out of step with the word of God it is the responsibility for the saints to bring it to the elders' attention and to press for that which is harmonious with the word.

Roman II, the source of local church organization. Now, I just ask that you read these paragraphs. I wrote them out a little bit, because I didn't want to spend much time in the class on them. As far as the New Testament record, Capital B, is concerned, elders first appear in chapter 11, verse 30 of the Book of Acts. It does seem that the apostles up to that time had oversight in the history of the local church. And I also would like to just make this comment that since the office of elder is not explained, it's reasonable to believe that it was a carry over from Judaism. And I make reference to some men who have developed this in their books and I suggest that if you're interested you can look up Norby's book *Relative to the Church* and FJA Horton's book on local church organization.

Roman III, the structure of local church organization. Now, we must remember that the Lord is the invisible head of the church. We're talking about the local church now in its structure on earth. Another important thing, the term office is not really found in the New Testament teaching on the church. Title and position are avoided. The important word is function. For example, I think it's all right to use the term "the office of elder" or the "office of deacon" but strictly speaking they're not called "offices" in the New Testament. There is no term for office that is used with reference to them. And the interesting thing about this, and the reason I mention it is that in Greek there were a number of terms for office, different kinds of office. There were a half a dozen terms, and these terms are used in the New Testament, most of them. But they were never applied to elders and deacons. It's almost as if the New Testament writers studiously avoided the use of the term office, because that might give the impression that an elder or a deacon in the local church was to be equated with the mayor of the city or that city manager or something like that. The stress in the New Testament is upon the office of elder and the office of deacon as functions of men appointed by God to serve in the local church. I think the impression you get is that the thing to be avoided is the elders and the deacons should never get to feel that they are lords over the flock of God. They are always servants among and in the flock. So I think that's a very needed warning for us. And for

those of you who are seminary students, if you'd like to look at that further I suggest that you read Professor Edward Sweizer's book on church order. Professor Sweizer is Professor of New Testament at the University of Zurich in Switzerland and is a well recognized scholar of the New Testament.

Capital A, the congregational body. What's the origin of membership in the local church? Well according to the New Testament a person becomes a member of the local church when he believes in Jesus Christ, is baptized, and begins to meet with the saints. That seems to be the pattern. As far as the origin, strictly speaking, is concerned, the origin is the new birth. The work of the Holy Spirit in bringing us into the possession of the life that characterizes the members of the church. The pattern by which we become a member is belief, baptism, regular meeting with the saints, sitting at the Lord's Table, and having fellowship with him. You go through the New Testament; this seems to be the pattern. It may be that you could become a member in some different way, but that's the general picture that you get from the New Testament.

What about membership rolls? The New Testament is absolutely silent regarding a membership roll. There are people who think you cannot operate a church if you do not have a membership roll, but you do not need a membership roll. I served in two churches as pastor of a church in which we had membership rolls. And I've been in Believers Chapel for fifteen years, and this is a much better system, as far as I'm concerned. And I find no lack of anything that is required for the effective work of the church in a system in which we do not have membership rolls. But we have membership. We regard you, if you meet regularly with us in Believers Chapel, as a member. If you have been born again and you have been baptized and you meet regularly with us, we regard you as a member. And we feel free as elders to speak to you concerning matters of discipline if we know that there is need of discipline. So membership rolls, we don't find anything like that in the New Testament.

Capital B, the elders or the under shepherds. Now, let me just make a comment and then we'll have to stop. And I'll pick up here after we've had ten minutes of a break. The elders or under shepherds, what I want to do now is to notice some features of this office. Incidentally, I put the question mark afterwards simply because I'm not sure that we should call it an office, but you understand now. I'm going to use the term office, but the primary idea is function.

Well, since it's twenty after and I want to give you ten minutes of rest, we'll stop here and I'll finish this lecture, and then we'll begin our second one in ten minutes. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]